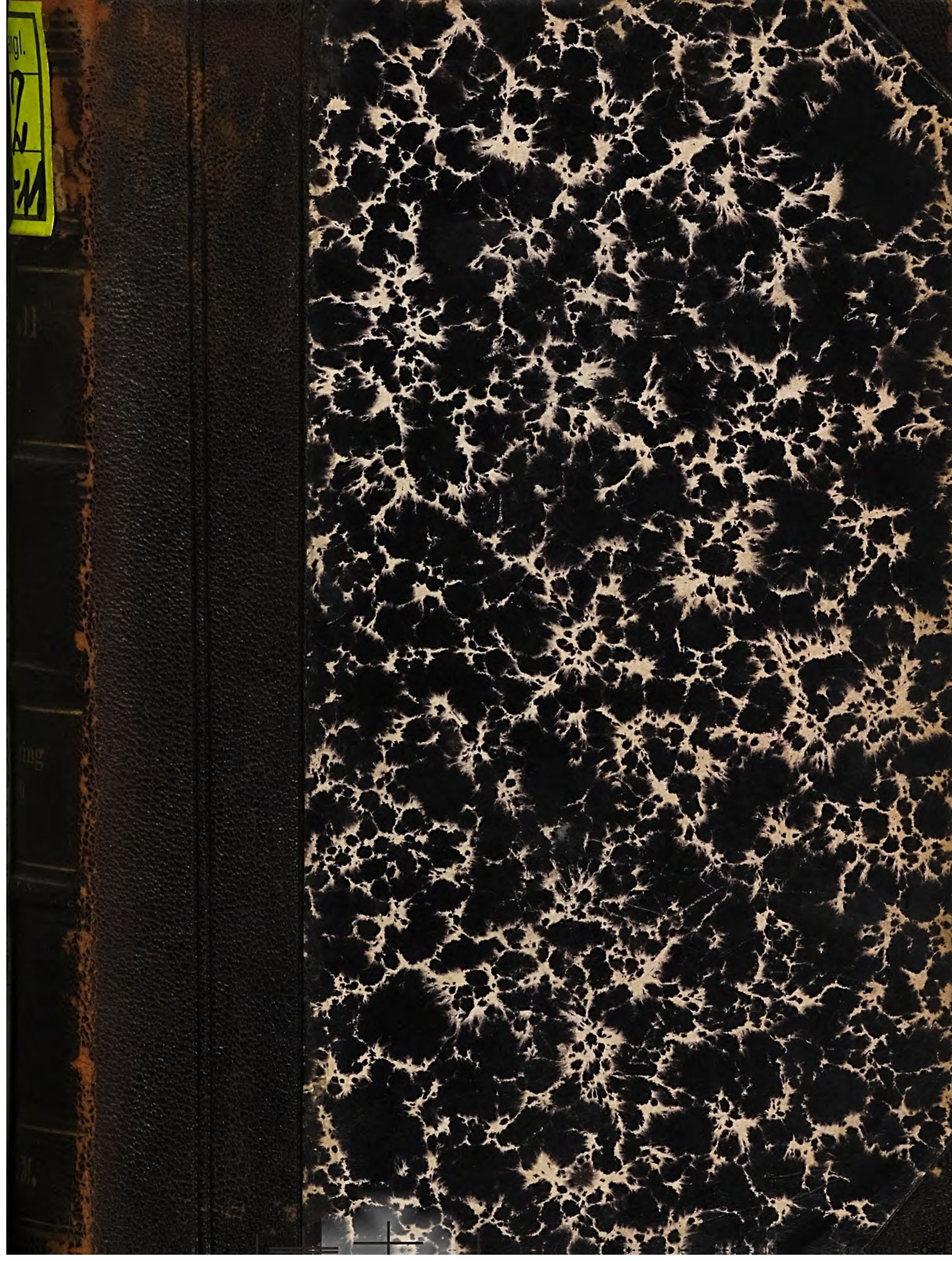




P. O. angl

Lyall

212 odd - 11

EACH VOLUME SOLD SEPARATELY.

P.O. angl. 212 of

M6

10

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

11

VOL. 3254.

WAYFARING MEN BY EDNA LYALL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

PARIS: LIBRAIRIE C. REINWALD, 15, RUE DES SAINTS-PÈRES.

PARIS: THE GALIGNANI LIBRARY, 224, RUE DE RIVOLI,
AND AT NICE, 48, QUAI ST. JEAN BAPTISTE.

This Collection

*is published with copyright for Continental circulation, but
all purchasers are earnestly requested not to introduce the
volumes into England or into any British Colony.*

(1898) 579.F

January 1898.

Tauchnitz Edition.

Latest Volumes:

The Massarenes.

A New Novel by Ouida.
2 vols.

Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland.

A New Novel by Olive Schreiner.
1 vol.

A Foreigner.

A New Novel by E. Gerard (Madame de Laszowska).
2 vols.

The Money-Spinner, etc.

New Character Sketches.
By H. S. Merriman & S. G. Tallentyre.
1 vol.

A Child of the Jago.

A New Novel by Arthur Morrison.
1 vol.

Lovice.

A New Novel by Mrs. Hungerford.
1 vol.

The Scenery of Switzerland.

A New Work.
By the Right Hon. Sir John Lubbock, Bart.
With Illustrations. 2 vols.

(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3254.

WAYFARING MEN. BY EDNA LYALL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

WE TWO	2 vols.
DONOVAN	2 vols.
IN THE GOLDEN DAYS . .	2 vols.
KNIGHT-ERRANT	2 vols.
WON BY WAITING	2 vols.

WAYFARING MEN

A NOVEL

BY

EDNA LYALL,

AUTHOR OF

"WE TWO," "DONOVAN," "WON BY WAITING," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1898.



“Every man’s task is his life-preserver. The conviction that his work is dear to God and cannot be spared, defends him.”

—EMERSON.

DEDICATED

TO THE MEMBERS OF A PROFESSION

WHICH I ADMIRE AND RESPECT.

“Thou goest thine, and I go mine,
Many ways we wend;
Many days, and many ways,
Ending in one end.

“Many a wrong, and its curing song;
Many a road, and many an inn;
Room to roam, but only one home
For all the world to win.”

GEORGE MAC DONALD.

WAYFARING MEN.

CHAPTER I.

“So is detached, so left all by itself,
The little life, the fact which means so much.
Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,

* * * * *

Now that the hand He trusted to receive,
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?
The better; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearer.”

R. BROWNING.

“I WONDER what will become of Ralph Denmead,” said Lady Tresidder, “it is one of the saddest cases I ever heard of; the poor boy seems to be left without a single relation.”

“Yes,” said Sir John, musingly. “Just the way with these old decayed families, they dwindle slowly away and then become extinct. There was no spirit or energy in poor Denmead, the man was a mere hermit and knew nothing of the world or he wouldn’t have made such a mull of his affairs.”

"Yet Ralph seems to have the energy of ten people," said Lady Tresidder, glancing as she walked at the river which wound its peaceful way through the park and reflected in the afternoon light the early spring tints of the wooded bank on its further side. At no great distance a boat glided swiftly over the calm water: in the stern sat a dark-haired, handsome girl of nineteen, while the vigorous little rower seemed to be not more than eleven.

"Poor little chap," said Sir John, "he is terribly cut up about his father's death. I wish we could have kept him here a few days longer, but it's better that he should be put at once into his guardian's hands. There's no fear that Sir Matthew Mactavish will not do all that's right for him, if only for the sake of his own reputation."

"I suppose he is a very charitable man," said Lady Tresidder.

"Oh, yes, extremely charitable, and very well thought of. For myself, I frankly own I don't like the way in which he mixes up speculation and philanthropy, and I'm not at all sure that he was always a good adviser to poor Denmead. But he'll be kind enough to Ralph, I've no doubt. The boy is his godson, and Denmead was one of his oldest friends. By-the-bye he was to be at the Rectory by five o'clock, and the boy ought to be there to receive him. They had better be landing, and Mabel can drive him to Whinhaven in the pony chaise."

He began to make vigorous signals to the occupants of the boat, who somewhat reluctantly came ashore and slowly mounted the rising ground to the house.

"Come in and have some tea while they are putting in Ranger," said Lady Tresidder, kindly. "Sir John thinks you ought to be at the Rectory when your guardian arrives, and Mab will like a drive with you."

Ralph grew grave at the thought of a turn to the desolate Rectory with its darkened windows and awful stillness; he sighed as he followed comfortable motherly Lady Tresidder into the drawing-room where flowers and well-used books and a cosy tea-table, and some needlework, just put aside, gave a curiously homelike air to the whole place.

"Come and sit by me," said his hostess in that friendly voice which more than anything helped him to forget his troubles. And perhaps it was the thought of the hard future confronting him which made Lady Tresidder glance so often at the little fellow who had outgrown the stage for petting, and who in spite of his smallness was really thirteen, innocent and ignorant of the world, and with a touch of the chivalrous gentleness of manner that had characterised his father, but in other respects just a high-spirited, enthusiastic, hungry boy.

His honest brown eyes grew less wistful as he waded blissfully through the huge slice of Buzzard cake with which Mabel had provided him, but he found the good-byes hard to say, all the harder because of the kindness he received. It was only afterwards, as they drove up the steep hill in the park, and turned for a last look at the river, that he could remember without a choking in his throat, Lady Tresidder's motherly kiss, and Sir

John's kindly farewell and cheery words about future visits, and the half sovereign with which he had "tipped" him.

There had been no particular reason why the Tresidders should have been so good to him. Sir John was not the Squire of Whinhaven, indeed Westbrook Hall was not even in his father's parish: but they had been practically Ralph's only friends ever since he could remember, and some of his happiest hours had been spent with Mab, who being many years his senior and a country girl of the best sort, had been able to teach him to ride and drive, to fish, to row, and to care for animals as devotedly as she herself did.

Mab had a frank, hail-fellow well-met manner which contrasted rather curiously with her beautiful womanly face and delicately chiselled features; the world in general considered her somewhat off-hand and brusque, but she had in her the makings of a very noble woman, and the boy owed much to her companionship. They were very silent as they drove through the park, but it was the comfortable silence of friends who have perfect confidence in each other. Ralph seemed to be looking with wistful eyes at every familiar turn of the road; his eyes rested lingeringly on the grey walls of the house down below, and the gleaming silvery river, and the old hawthorn bushes, and the fine old chestnut trees.

"Mab," he said at length, "may we stop for a minute, and just see the bullfinches? Look, there is one of them

out of the nest and trying to fly; the cat will get hold of it."

"Why, to be sure," said Mab. "Will you care to take it with you to London? It is fledged and I think you could rear it. Would you like it?"

"Rather!" said Ralph emphatically. "And I have a cage at home that would do for it."

So the young bullfinch was carefully placed in a covered basket, and half an hour later Mabel Tresidder put down the two forlorn young things at the door of Whinhaven Rectory wondering how they would prosper in life.

A severe-looking old housekeeper came out at the sound of the wheels.

"So you've come back, Master Ralph," she said looking him over critically to see that he was clean and presentable. "That's a good job, for Sir Matthew has been here ten minutes or more, and the lawyer from London with him. Are you coming in, Miss?" she added, glancing with no great favour at Miss Tresidder, and calling to mind how often in past days she had led Ralph through bush and through brier to the great detriment of his clothes.

"No, I will not come in," said Mab, "and this is not my real good-bye to you, Ralph, for I shall stay and speak to you to-morrow morning after the service."

She waved her hand to him, and drove swiftly off, while old Mrs. Grice muttered something uncomplimentary

about "new-fangled" ways, and not liking females at a funeral.

Ralph, meanwhile, had carefully hidden away the basket containing the bullfinch, and now stood in the little hall with a heavy heart. The quiet of the house was terrible, and the low murmur of strange voices in the study accentuated the misery and desolateness, which seemed to grow more and more oppressive every moment.

"For goodness sake!" exclaimed old Mrs. Grice, "don't stand there staring at nothing, like a tragedy actor, but go in and make yourself agreeable to the gentlemen; wait a bit, wait a bit, your hair's all rumpled up, not seen a brush since the morning, I'll be bound."

Ralph, made meek by his misery, obediently turned into the room to the right of the door, his own special sanctum where he had worked and played ever since he could remember, and having brushed his wavy brown hair into a state of immaculate order went slowly back once more to the silent little hall which was not even enlivened now by the presence of old Mrs. Grice. Nothing was to be heard save the ticking of the clock and the low murmur of voices from the adjoining room, not a creature was there to take compassion on the shy desolate boy. He looked up at the black representation of Lord John Harsick and Katharine his wife, which hung upon the wall above the old oak chest, and the tears started to his eyes as he remembered how he had helped his father to mount this rubbing from a brass,

some two or three years before. The stately old couple stood there holding each others' hands, he fancied that they looked down on him with a sort of pity because he was left so utterly alone. He stood hesitatingly on the threshold of the study, dreading to enter, but at length impelled to move by a worse fear.

"If they come out and catch me here they'll think I'm eavesdropping!" he thought to himself, and therewith manfully turned the handle, and walked in.

The study was in reality the drawing-room of the Rectory, a pretty room with a verandah and French windows opening on to it, and upon one side of the fireplace there was a cosy little recess where the Rector had been wont to keep his choicest flowers, and where the light from a little western window fell upon the marble bust of a sweet-faced woman—the mother whom Ralph could remember just in a vague dreamy fashion. Seated now at his father's writing-table was an old gentleman with a kindly, astute face, and remarkably thick white hair. Standing with his back to the fireplace was a middle-aged man whom Ralph at once recognised from the photographs he had seen as his godfather, Sir Matthew Mactavish. He looked up anxiously into the shrewd Scottish face, with its reddish hair just touched with grey, its keen steel-coloured eyes, its somewhat wrinkled forehead and ready smile. It was a powerful and an attractive face, but with something about it curiously different to the faces to which Ralph had been accustomed; the genial country squires, and the country

parsons had nothing in common with this brisk, managing man of the world.

"Well, my boy," he said with a kindly greeting, "I'm glad to see you. You'll not remember me, for you were but a little fellow when I was last here. Let me see, they call you Raphe, don't they?"

"Not Raphe, but Ralph," said the boy, and into his mind there darted the recollection of a scene that had once been funny but now seemed pathetic, of a discussion upon his name between his father and two old antiquaries, and of how one of them had patted him on the head with the gruff-voiced injunction, "If anyone calls you 'Raphe' tell him he's a fool."

It was impossible to call such a man as Sir Matthew a fool, and the boy turned to greet the lawyer, and was surprised to find that unlike the typical solicitor of fiction he was a very noble-looking man of the old school, gentle and courtly in manner, and evidently understanding how embarrassing the interview must be to a lad of thirteen.

"Sit down, Ralph," said Sir Matthew, motioning him to a chair, "there are several things I must talk to you about."

Ralph obeyed, not without a curious sensation at being ordered about in his own home by a perfect stranger. "Mr. Marriott and I," resumed his godfather, "have been looking into your father's affairs on our way from London, and as a matter of fact they were pretty well

known to me before. I grieve to say, my boy, that he has left you quite unprovided for."

"I—I knew," said Ralph, "that father had lost a great deal of money lately—it was through some company that failed: he told me he never would have speculated, but he wanted very much to make money and send me to Winchester and then to Oxford; he couldn't do that, you know, only out of the living. But he blamed himself for having done it; he said it was no better than gambling."

Sir Matthew had paced up and down the room restlessly during this speech, he seemed to be moved by it, and it was the lawyer who first broke the silence. "You are happy," he said to Ralph, "in having the memory of a father who was just enough to recognise his own mistakes, and noble enough to confess them. Be warned, my boy, and never in the future dabble in speculation."

Sir Matthew returned to his former position on the hearthrug. "In the meantime," he said with displeasure in his tone, "his more useful study will be how to live in the present."

"That," said Mr. Marriott gravely, "is a matter which you, Sir Matthew, will no doubt help him to consider."

Ralph, with a child's quick consciousness that something lay beneath these words which he did not altogether understand, glanced from one to the other in some perplexity. He saw that Sir Matthew was angry

with the lawyer, and that the lawyer disapproved somehow of Sir Matthew.

"I wish Mr. Marriott had been my godfather," he thought to himself. "I like him twice as well. Sir Matthew orders one about as though he bossed the whole world."

And then, as often happens, he was forced to modify his rather severe criticism of his godfather, for Sir Matthew with a genuinely kind glance drew him nearer, and laying a hand on his shoulder, said in the most genial of voices:

"Don't you be afraid, my boy, I'll see you through your trouble. Leave everything to me. We'll have you a Wykehamist as I know your father wished, and then make a parson of you, eh?"

"Oh no, thank you," said Ralph, "I couldn't be a clergyman, I don't want to be that at all."

"Eh! What! you have already some other idea? Come tell me, for it's a real help to know what a boy's tastes are."

"I want to be an actor," said Ralph quietly.

"What!" cried Sir Matthew. "Go on the stage? Oh, that's just a passing fancy. No gentleman can take up play-acting as a profession. No, no, I don't send you to Winchester to fit you for such a trumpery calling as that. If you'll not be a parson what do you say to trying for the Indian Civil Service? I'm much mistaken if you have not very good abilities, and for a man who

has to make his own way in the world, why India is the right place."

"I should like to go to India," said Ralph, thinking of certain tales of jungle life and thrilling adventures with man-eating tigers that he had lately read.

"Very well," said Sir Matthew briskly, "that's decided then. To Winchester for six years, then a choice of the Church or the Indian Civil Service. There's your future, my boy, and I will see you fairly started in life whichever line you choose. To-morrow you shall come back with me to London, so run off now and let them get your things together, and Mr. Marriott and I will make all the necessary arrangements with regard to your father's effects."

Not sorry to be dismissed, Ralph made his way upstairs, where he found the housekeeper already busy with his packing. She made him collect what few possessions he had, two or three pictures, some tools, some books and a toy boat; but what she termed "the rubbish," such as bird's eggs, mosses, fossils, imperfect models of engines, and such-like, she entirely declined to handle. "The rubbish" must be left, and Ralph with an odd sinking of the heart, as he remembered how short was the time remaining to him, began his sad round of farewells. He stole quietly up to the attic from which the harbour could best be seen, and watched the stately ships going into port. Then he walked through the garden with lingering steps; he had worked in it with his father so long and so happily that every plant was

dear to him; to leave it just now in this May weather, when the Gloire de Dijon on the south wall was covered with exquisite roses, when the snapdragons, which as a little fellow he had delighted in feeding with spoonfuls of sugar and water, were just coming into flower, when the bedding-out plants, which but three weeks ago they had planted, were actually in bloom—this was hard indeed! Could it be only three weeks since that half-holiday when, with no thought of coming trouble, they had worked so merrily together?

Passing through the green lauristinus arch he paced slowly on between the strawberry-beds now white with blossom. That Saturday had been their last really happy day, for the next morning's post had brought the news of his father's great losses, and though the Sunday's work had been struggled through, the Rector had never been the same again, the burdened look had never left his face.

He mused on it once more as he rested his arms on the little iron gate leading into the glebe, his eyes wandering sadly over that distant view which he had always loved, with its stretch of gorse and heather, and to the right the beautiful woods of Whinhaven park, just now in the full perfection of their spring tints. Well, it was all over now, and the place was to pass into the hands of strangers, and somehow he must get through his good-byes. Making his way to the stable, he flung his arms about the neck of old Forester the pony, choked back a sob in his throat as he unfastened Skipper,

the Irish terrier, and picking up in his arms a scared-looking white cat, ran at full speed down the drive, across the common, with its golden gorse and dark fir trees, until he reached the coastguard station. Beneath the flagstaff, with a telescope tucked under his arm, there stood a cheery-looking official in trim reefer and gold-laced cap. It was Langston—the head of the coastguard station, and one of Ralph's best friends.

"I have come to say good-bye, for to-morrow I'm going to London," said the boy hurriedly. "And I want to give you Skipper, if you care to have him. He's of a very good breed, father said, and he's an awfully friendly dog. And if you had room for Toots as well I should be awfully obliged. I know he's not worth anything, and ever since Benjamin was lost Toots has been sort of queer, always mewing and roaming about looking for him. But I think if you buttered his feet he would stay, and he's a real good mouser."

Langston promised to adopt both dog and cat, but he would not allow all the giving to be on one side. He went into his house and returned in a few minutes with a little pocket compass.

"I'll ask you to accept that, Master Ralph," he said, as he gripped the boy's hand in a friendly grasp. "You'll maybe have rough times in life, but steer well, my lad, steer well, and be the man your father would have had you."

"How does one steer if one doesn't know which is the right way to go?" said Ralph with a sigh.

"Why, it's then that you'll hear your captain's orders," said the coastguardsman. "Cheer up, Master Ralph, it don't all depend on the man at the wheel."

CHAPTER II.

"Ill is that angel which erst fall from heaven,
But not more ill than he, nor in worse case,
Who hides a traitorous mind with smiling face,
And with a dove's white feather masks a raven,
Each sin some colour hath it to adorn.
Hypocrisy, Almighty God doth scorn."

WM. DRUMMOND, 1616.

DINNER proved a trying meal that evening, although Sir Matthew and Mr. Marriott exerted themselves to talk, and were both of them very kind to their small companion. Afterwards they adjourned once more to the study where for the sake of the old lawyer a fire had been lighted.

"The nights are still cold," he said drawing a chair towards the hearth, and warming his thin white hands; "May is but a treacherous month in spite of the good things the poets say of it. I understand that your father's illness was caused by a chill," he added, glancing kindly at Ralph.

"He caught cold one night when they sent for him down in the village," said Ralph, tears starting to his eyes. "He was called up at two o'clock to see a man who was dying; there was an east wind, he said it

seemed to go right through him. But then you know he had been very much troubled because of his losses; for the last ten days he had scarcely eaten anything, and had slept badly."

Sir Matthew paced the room restlessly, but when he spoke his voice was bland and calm.

"A noble end!" he said, "dying in harness like that; carrying comfort to the dying and then lying down upon his own death-bed; a very noble end."

Something in the tone of this speech grated on Ralph, he shrank a little closer to the lawyer.

"Why do I hate him?" thought the boy. "He's going to send me to Winchester with his own money, I ought to like him, but I can't—I can't!"

At that moment old Mrs. Grice appeared at the door asking to speak with Mr. Marriott. He followed her into the hall returning in a minute or two and approaching Ralph.

"My boy," he said, laying a kindly hand on his shoulder, "if you want to see your father's face again it must be now."

Together they went up the dimly lighted staircase to the room overhead, Sir Matthew following slowly and with reluctance, a strange expression lurking about the corners of his mouth. Many thoughts passed through his mind as he stood looking down upon the still features of his dead friend; if the pale lips could have spoken he well knew they might have reproached him; and yet it was less painful to him to look at the stern

face of the dead, than to watch the grief of the little lad as, through fast-falling tears he gazed for the last time on his father's face. It was a relief to him when the old lawyer drew the boy gently away, and persuaded him to return to the study fire.

"I will be good to his son," thought Sir Matthew as he looked once more at the silent form. "I will make it up to Ralph. He shall have the education his father would have given him. And then he must shift for himself, I shall have done my duty, and he must sink or swim. The very sight of him annoys me, but it will be only for a few years, and, meantime, I must put up with it."

So Ralph for the last time slept in the only home he had ever known, and woke the next day to endure as best he might all the last painful ceremonies through which it was necessary that he should bear his part. When the funeral was over he left Sir John Tresidder to talk with the lawyer and Sir Matthew, and drew Mab away into a sheltered nook of the walled kitchen garden where stood a rabbit-hutch.

"These are the only things left," he said, mournfully. "Should you care to have them, Mab? I should like them to be at Westbrook, for I know you would be good to them. Rabbi Ben Ezra is the best rabbit that ever lived, and he'll soon get to care for you. Sarah Jane is rather dull, but I suppose he likes her, and she doesn't eat her little ones or do anything horrid of that sort like some rabbits."

"I will take no end of care of them," said Mab; "but it seems a pity that you should leave them. Could you not take them with you?"

"If I were going to live with Mr. Marriott I wouldn't mind asking leave," said Ralph, "but there's something about Sir Matthew—I don't know what it is—but one can't ask a favour of him. I'd far rather give up the rabbits."

"Perhaps you are right," said Mab. "And by the bye, Ralph, let me have your new address, you are to live with your guardian, are you not?"

"They say Sir Matthew is not exactly my guardian. But father's will was made many years ago and he was named as sole executor, and father wrote to him the day before he died asking him to see to me. Here comes the man to say your carriage is ready."

"Very well," said Mab. "And tell Mrs. Grice I will send over for the rabbits. Good-bye, dear old boy. Don't forget us all."

She stooped down, and for the first time in her life kissed him, and Ralph having watched at the gate till the carriage was out of sight, suddenly felt a horrible wave of desolation sweep over him, and knew that he could not keep up one minute longer. Running down the road he fled through the churchyard, never stopping till he found himself in a lovely sheltered fir-grove—his favourite nook in the whole park; and here, while the nightingales, and the cuckoos, and the thrushes sang joyously overhead, he threw himself down at full length

on the slippery pine needles that covered the warm dry ground, and sobbed as though his heart would break. They had always called this particular nook the "Goodly Heritage," because whenever friends had been brought to see it they had always said to the Rector: "Ah, Denmead, your lines are fallen in pleasant places." Poor Ralph felt that this saying was no longer true, he thought that the pleasantness had forever vanished from his life, and the prospect of going forth into the world dependent for every penny upon a man whom he vaguely disliked was almost more than he could endure. The boy had a keenly sensitive artistic temperament, but luckily his father's strenuous endeavours had taught him self-control; he did not long abandon himself to that passion of grief but pulled himself together and began to pace slowly through the grove crushing into his hand as he walked a rough hard fir-cone. And then gradually as he breathed the soft pine-scented air, and watched the sunbeams streaking with light the dark fir-trunks, and glorifying the silvery birch-trees in a distant glade which sloped steeply down to a little murmuring brook, he realised that the past was his goodly heritage, his possession of which no man could rob him, and in thankfulness for the home which had been so happy for thirteen years he set his face bravely towards the dark future.

*

*

*

*

*

"Waterloo, first single, a child's ticket," said Sir

Matthew Mactavish entering the booking-office an hour or two later.

"But I am thirteen," said Ralph quickly.

"Then he must have a whole ticket," said the official, and Sir Matthew frowned but was obliged to comply.

"You are so absurdly small," he said glancing with annoyance at his charge as they passed out on to the platform, "you might very well have passed for under twelve."

Ralph felt hot all over, partly because no boy likes to be told that he is small, partly because he was angry at being reproved for not standing calmly by to see the railway company cheated. How could it be that a man as wealthy as Sir Matthew could stoop to do a thing which his father in spite of narrow means would never have thought of doing? He could as soon have imagined him stealing goods from a shop as attempting to defraud in this meaner, because less risky, fashion. However, Mr. Marriott happily diverted his thoughts just then.

"Are you fond of Dickens?" he said kindly. "Have you read his 'Tale of Two Cities,' or his 'Christmas Tales?'"

Ralph had read neither, and was soon leaning back in his corner of the railway carriage, forgetful of all his wretchedness, cheered and fascinated, amused and filled with kind thoughts by the story of Scrooge, and Marley's ghost, and Tiny Tim, and the Christmas turkey.

It was with a pang of regret that he bade old Mr. Marriott farewell when they reached London, and il-

logically yet naturally enough he felt far more grateful for the parting sovereign and the kindly glance which the lawyer bestowed on him, than for his adoption by Sir Matthew. A sense of utter desolation stole over him as Mr. Marriott disappeared, and he followed his guardian into a hansom and found himself for the first time in the heart of London. To his country eyes the crowded thoroughfares, the grim houses, the bustle and confusion, and the sordid misery seemed absolutely hateful; it was not until they happened to pass a theatre, and he caught sight of the name of a well known actor that his face brightened and his tongue was unloosed.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "does Washington act there? Is that his own theatre?"

"Yes, to be sure," said Sir Matthew; "you shall go some night and see him."

"Oh, thank you!" said Ralph rapturously; "how awfully good of you. Father took me once to hear him at Southampton, he was playing in 'The Bells' one Saturday afternoon. It was splendid; there was the dream you know, you saw it all before you. He dreamt of the court of justice, and all the time it was his own conscience that was killing him, and his remorse for having murdered the traveller in the sleigh. I thought I should have choked at the end when he believed they were hanging him; he just says, you know, in a sort of gasp, 'Take the rope off my neck!' and then he falls back dead, and the play ends. It felt so jolly to get out of the dark theatre into the street, and to find the

sun shining, and everything as jolly as usual, and to know that all that dreadful misery wasn't really true."

"Not true?" said Sir Matthew reflectively. "H'm!" He looked with a sort of envy at the boy's clear innocent eyes, then he turned away; whether he were absorbed in his own thoughts or in the observation of the dingy crowd, it would have been hard to say.

They paused at a house in Bow Street where he had to make some inquiry, and Ralph fell into a happy dream about his latest hero the great actor, returning with a pang to the uncomfortable present when the hansom at length drew up at a house in Queen Anne's Gate. Feeling very small and desolate he followed his guardian up the broad steps and into the imposing entrance hall.

"Wipe your shoes," said Sir Matthew, in his brisk authoritative tone.

Ralph obediently complied, and saw somewhat to his amusement that the same command was printed in large black letters on the mat.

"When I have a house of my own," he reflected, "there shall be a doormat with SALVE on it. Then the chaps will know I'm awfully glad to see them, and that I'm not thinking first of my carpets."

Sir Matthew, meantime, had been talking to a grey-headed butler; Ralph only caught the closing remark: "And let someone show Master Denmead up to the school-room."

The butler looked at the small lonely boy in his black suit. "Fräulein and Miss Evereld are out, sir,"

he replied, unwilling to send this sad-faced little lad into the utter solitude of the upper regions.

"Oh, very well, then you had better come with me, Ralph," said Sir Matthew, and he led the way upstairs. The boy glanced nervously round as they entered. This was not one of the homelike, comfortable, used drawing-rooms such as he had grown to love at Westbrook Hall, but a great saloon upholstered in the best style of a well-known firm, and as lacking in soul and individuality as a Parisian doll.

There were several people present. Lady Mactavish, a peevish-looking woman with small suspicious blue eyes and a nervous manner, shook hands with him and looked him over in a dissatisfied way as though mentally reflecting what in the world she was to do with him.

"Janet," she called turning to her elder daughter, "this is poor Mr. Denmead's son."

Janet, a somewhat sharp-featured clever-looking girl of four-and-twenty, came up and shook hands with him, but her cold light eyes beneath the fringe of red hair looked to him unfriendly. She just passed him on to her younger sister who was enjoying a comfortable little flirtation at the other side of the room with a middle-aged officer.

"This is Ralph Denmead, Minnie," she said, returning to her former place, and resuming the interrupted conversation with a lady caller.

Minnie, who was also red-haired, had a more friendly expression, she smiled at him as she shook hands.

"Fräulein has taken Evereld to her French class, but they will soon be home, and then they will look after you," she said, motioning him to a chair at some little distance from herself and the Major. It was a modern imitation of an antique chair, very hard in the seat, very high from the ground, and with rich carving all over the back which made any sort of comfort impossible. As he sat on it with his legs uncomfortably dangling, he saw the lady who was talking to Janet put up her long-handled eye-glass, and inspect him critically as if he had been some strange animal at the Zoological Gardens. However small schoolboys were not interesting, she soon put down the eye-glass and turned to Miss Mactavish with a question which arrested Ralph's attention.

"By-the-bye, have you read 'The Marriage of Melissa'? It is the book of the season, you must get it, my dear, at once, everyone is talking of it, and it is an open secret that Sir Algernon Wyte and Mrs. Hereward Lyne wrote it, though of course it appeared anonymously."

"What is it? A society novel?"

"Yes, and such a plot! There's a tremendous run upon it they say, and wherever you go you hear people discussing it."

Then followed a graphic account of the chief characters, and the most difficult situations; it was a plot which made the boy's ears tingle. He wriggled round in his chair and tried to become interested in the vapid talk of Major Gillot and Minnie, it was doubtless very interesting to them, but to him it seemed the most in-

sane interchange of bantering compliments and teasing replies that he had ever heard. Was this love-making? he wondered. If so, they did it much better in books, It was not in this fashion that Frank Osbaldistone wooed Di Vernon, or that John Ridd made love to Lorna Doone.

He looked wearily across to the hearthrug where Sir Matthew was shouting unintelligible jargon about the money market into the ear of a deaf old Scotsman; then in desperation tried to listen to Lady Mactavish's grumbling voice as she related her difficulties to a soothing and sympathetic friend.

"You are always burdening yourself with other people's affairs," said the purring voice of the adept in flattery.

"Well," said Lady Mactavish, "you see my husband is one of those men who inspire confidence. They all turn to him naturally. And I do assure you he has a perfect passion for adopting children. There's this boy to-day. To-morrow it will be some other sad case. A little while ago it was Evereld Ewart, poor Sir Richard Ewart's little girl. You must see her by-and-bye. Yes, we have taken her in and her nurse and her German governess. It's been a very great anxiety to me, a great responsibility, though I make no complaint of the child. Still one likes to have one's house to oneself."

"And dear Sir Matthew," remarked the friend, "is fast turning it into an orphan asylum. But there, it's

just like him! so noble-minded! So ready to give and glad to distribute!"

There came a little interlude with the tea. Ralph handed about cups and hot scones, which looked very tempting, he thought. But there was no cup for him; evidently boys of his age were not supposed to feed in the drawing-room. He returned to the mock antique chair with its bony back and thought wistfully of the drawing-room at Westbrook Hall, and wondered whether Mab was at this very moment finishing that particularly good Buzzard cake to which she had so lavishly helped him yesterday. At lunch he had been too miserable to eat, but now he was ravenous, and to be at once hungry and lonely and unhappy was a sensation he had never before experienced. How was he to bear this detestable new life? How was he to take root in this uncongenial soil?

His dismal reverie was interrupted by Lady Mac-tavish's voice: "Just ring the bell, Ralph. By this time she must surely be in." Then as the butler appeared, the welcome news came that Miss Evereld was at that moment on the stairs. Orders were given that she should come in at once.

Ralph looked eagerly towards the open door, and watched the entrance of a little girl who was apparently about a year or two younger than himself. She was dressed in a short black frock trimmed with crape, but nothing else about her was mournful, her nut-brown hair seemed full of golden sunbeams, her rosy face was

dimpled and smiling; she seemed neither shy nor forward, but stood patiently listening to the remarks of Lady Mactavish, and old Lady Mountpleasant, as long as was necessary, then having received a warm greeting from Sir Matthew, who appeared to be genuinely fond of her, she caught sight of Ralph and, crossing the room, shook hands with him in an eager friendly way. The tide of general conversation rolled on, but the two children stood silently looking at each other for a minute or two. At last Evereld had a happy intuition.

"Are you not hungry?" she said.

"Yes, starving," said Ralph, with a pathetic glance at the scones.

"It's no good," said Evereld, noting the look. "We never have anything down here, but we'll try and slip away quietly. No one really wants us, you see. And I'll beg Bridget to make us some hot buttered toast. She is the dearest old thing in the world."

"Does she live here?" said Ralph, as though he doubted whether anything superlatively good would be found beneath Sir Matthew's roof.

"She is my nurse," said Evereld. "We came from India, you know, last February. Her husband was a soldier but he died, and then she came to be our servant. Look, some more callers are coming in, now is our time to slip out."

Ralph gladly followed the little girl as she glided dexterously from the room, and it was with a sense of

mingled triumph and relief that they found themselves outside on the staircase.

"Fräulein Ellerbeck and I have been talking all day about your coming," said Evereld, as they toiled up to the top of the house. "The telegram only came at breakfast."

"They must all have thought it an awful bore to have me," said Ralph, remembering Lady Mactavish's preference for having her house to herself.

"We schoolroom people didn't think it a bore," said Evereld, gaily. "You can't think how dull it is to have no one to play with. I could hardly do my French this afternoon for wondering about you, and once when the master asked me something about the difference between *connaître* and *savoir*, I said, by mistake, 'Ralph Denmead.' It was dreadful! Everyone laughed." She laughed herself at the remembrance. "But, you see, I had been thinking how well we should get to know each other."

A comforting sense of comradeship crept into Ralph's sore heart; he forgot his troubles for awhile as he looked at the merry face beside him. It was what he would have called an "awfully jolly" little face, with soft curves and a dainty little mouth and chin, a rounded forehead from which the hair was unfashionably thrown back, and a pair of clear blue eyes that made him think of speedwell blossoms.

Evereld led him in triumph to the schoolroom to introduce him to her governess, and Miss Ellerbeck's

warm German greeting, so unlike the chilly reception he had met with in the drawing-room, at once set him at his ease. Bridget, too, accorded him a hearty welcome, and brought in enough toast even to satisfy a hungry schoolboy. She was a motherly person, with one of those rather melancholy dark faces of almost Spanish outline which one meets with among the Mayo peasants. But not all her wanderings or her troubles as a soldier's wife and widow had robbed her of that delicious quaint humour which brightens many a desolate Irish cabin, and which brightened some parts of this great desolate London house.

CHAPTER III.

"I do not love thee, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this alone I know full well,
I do not love thee, Dr. Fell."

PRECISELY why the house seemed to him so dreary Ralph would have found it hard to say. It did not usually strike people as anything but a model English home. Something had, however, given the boy a clue, and already he vaguely guessed, what no one else suspected, that there was a skeleton in the cupboard. Little enough had fallen from his father's lips during those last days, yet Ralph had gathered an impression that in some way Sir Matthew was connected with that disastrous speculation which had ruined his father. He was far too young and ignorant to understand the matter, and even had he been sure that Mr. Marriott knew all the facts he could not have asked the old lawyer to explain things to him, for was not Sir Matthew his godfather? a godfather, moreover, who had generously undertaken to provide for him till he was grown up? He was ashamed of himself for not being able to feel more grateful, but that vague dislike and distrust which he had felt during their first talk at Whinhaven Rectory, only grew stronger each hour.

When the last guest had departed, Sir Matthew was beset by eager questions.

"Why did you adopt that horrid little schoolboy, papa?" said Janet, reproachfully. "You are far too generous."

"My dear, you forget; he is my godson, and I couldn't leave him without a helping hand. His father entrusted him to me."

"They are all ready to sponge upon you, papa," said Minnie. "A reputation for generosity is a terrible thing."

"For a man's daughters, eh?" he said, laughingly. "Well, my dear, I don't want you to be troubled in the least. The boy will be going to Winchester in September, and we shall only have him in the holidays. As for little Evereld, we shall not be keeping her after her first season unless I'm much mistaken."

"It's true she is an heiress," said Lady Mactavish, critically, "but I doubt if she will make a very stylish girl. And she's far too conscientious to get on well in society."

"Well, well, we shall see," said Sir Matthew, easily. "Already she has one fervent admirer. Bruce Wylie makes himself a perfect fool about the child."

"He's old enough to be her father," said Janet.

"But she couldn't have a better husband," said Sir Matthew, in the voice that meant that no more was to be said. "Nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to see poor Ewart's daughter safely under the pro-

tection of a man like Wylie, before the heiress-hunters have had time to torment her."

"You remember that he dines with us this evening?" said Lady Mactavish.

"Yes, to be sure; let me have a list of the guests. And, my dear, remind me that I promised Lady Mountpleasant to open the bazaar for the Decayed Gentlefolk's Aid Society at the Albert Hall next month."

"We are no sooner off with one bazaar than we are on with another," protested Minnie. "Bazaars seem to me the curse of the age."

"Blessings in disguise, my dear," replied her father, with a smile. "The days of simple humdrum giving are over, and nowadays, with great wisdom, we kill two or more birds with one stone. To my mind, the bazaar is a most useful institution, and I should be sorry to see it abandoned."

"Ah, you would ruin yourself with giving, if I allowed you to do it," said Lady Mactavish, glancing up at him with an air of pride and admiration which for the moment made her hard face beautiful.

The words touched him, and as he left the room he stooped and kissed her forehead. Yet, on the way down to his library, an odd sarcastic smile played about his lips, and he thought to himself, "They have yet to learn that, had St. Paul been a man of the world, he would have added a postscript to his famous chapter, and said, 'For charity is the best policy.'"

In the meanwhile the schoolroom party were snugly

ensconced in the window-seat overlooking St. James's Park. Ralph had been cheered by the sight of a troop of Horse Guards, and Miss Ellerbeck had been beguiled into telling them stories of the Franco-Prussian War and of her brother's adventures during the campaign. By-and-bye, as the evening advanced, they were interrupted by the appearance of old Geraghty the butler.

"Sir Matthew would like you to be in the drawing-room before dinner, Miss Evereld," he said, "and I was to say there was no need for the young gentleman to come down. Maybe he's tired after the journey," concluded the Irishman, adding these polite words of his own accord, for Sir Matthew had curtly remarked, "Not Master Denmead, you understand."

"That means that Mr. Bruce Wylie is coming!" cried Evereld, joyously. "He's such a nice man, and he always brings me chocolate—real French chocolate. I never go down unless Mr. Wylie is there. You'll like him, Ralph; he has such nice kind eyes, and such a soft voice."

"Well, you must run and dress, my child," said Miss Ellerbeck; "and I, too, must be wishing you both good-night, for I go, as you remember, with a friend to the Richter concert. We will light the gas for you, Ralph, and then you must, for a short time, make yourself happy with your Charles Dickens. Evereld will soon come back to you."

She bade him a kind good-night, and Ralph took up "The Cricket on the Hearth" and tried to read.

But it would not do; the book had ceased to appeal to him. He threw it down, lowered the gas, and returned to the open window, leaning his arms on the sill and looking down through the bars at the dim road beneath, with its endless succession of cabs and carriages. For a little while it amused him to count the red and yellow lamps as they flitted by, but soon his sorrow overwhelmed him once more. It was the first time he had been alone since that morning hour in the fir-grove at Whinhaven, and now once more all the misery of his loss forced itself upon him. He was well fed, well housed, and his immediate future was provided for, yet, perhaps, in all London, there was not at that moment a more desolate little fellow. To be violently plucked up by the roots and for ever banished from that goodly heritage that had so far been his, was in itself hard enough; but to belong to no one in particular, to be planted down and expected to grow and thrive among loveless strangers seemed intolerable, and no ambitious dreams of a future in India came now to his help! He saw nothing before him but an endless vista of this same pain and aching loss. To-morrow would be as to-day, and all real happiness had, he fancied, gone from him for ever. There is nothing quite so poignant as a child's first great grief, though mercifully, like all acute pain, it cannot last long.

The passing lights down below had long ceased to interest him, but presently through his tears he happened to notice the pointers and the Pole Star, and found a

sort of comfort in what had for so long been familiar. At anyrate the same sky was over Whinhaven and London, and the motto which he could remember puzzling over in his childhood, illuminated in one of the Rectory rooms, returned now to his mind—"Astra castra, Numen lumen." It was true that the stars were his canopy, but was God his light? Had He not plunged his whole life in darkness, and set him far away from love and help and all that could keep a boy straight?

The Westminster chimes rang out just then into the night air, startling him back from his perplexed wondering. Ralph was not of the temperament that is liable to doubt. He took life very simply, and it would have been almost impossible seriously to disturb the faith into which he had grown up; the wave of wretched questioning passed, and he knew in his heart that just as over the great city with its debates and crimes, its sorrows and struggles, the bells ring out their message, so heavenly voices are ringing through the consciences of men, guiding, controlling, influencing all. Had not his father always said it was mere miserable cowardice to believe that darkness would triumph over light, that selfish competition would in the end conquer? Love was to be the victor. Love was to rule. And the great deep bell as it boomed out the hour seemed to his fancy to ring—"Love! Love! Love!" over the restless crowd of hearers.

In the meantime, however, his heart was still aching with the loss of the man who had been friend and com-

panion, teacher and father in one. Surely since God loved him He would send someone to comfort him? Someone whose voice he could hear, whose hand he could grasp. For after all it was the outward tokens of love and comfort that he craved, as all beings of a threefold nature must crave them. A spiritual love could not as yet suffice him.

Now as Ralph leant on the window-sill crying quietly, much as a soldier slowly bleeds on a battlefield because there is no one to staunch his wound, the schoolroom door opened. He had expected someone to be sent to his great need, but had pictured to himself a man. He glanced round into the dim room and started when he saw, instead, only a little white-robed figure.

"Of course," he thought to himself in his disappointment, "I ought to have known. It is only Evereld come back."

"Oh, it's you," he said, with profound dejection in his voice.

"Are you all in the dark?" said Evereld.

"I've been looking at the carriage lamps," he replied, evasively.

Evereld made no comment, she knew quite well that he had been crying, and a great shyness stole over her—a terror of not being able to reach him, and yet a consuming desire somehow to comfort him. She remembered that in her own grief grown-up people had always tried to soothe her with the adjuration, "Don't cry, darling." She had never found any comfort in the

words, and of course they would vex a boy. Dick would have hated them.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, "in some ways you do so remind me of Dick."

"Who is he?" asked Ralph, still in the dejected voice.

"Dick is my brother," said Evereld. "He died last winter. There was an outbreak of cholera. On the Thursday father and mother died, on the Friday Dick and I were taken ill, and when I got better they told me he was gone. I was the only one left." Her voice quivered a little. She ended abruptly.

"Oh!" cried Ralph, like one in pain, and instinctively he caught her hand in his and held it fast. There was a silence. It seemed as if they did not need words just then.

Ralph had not found the strong man of his dreams; he had found instead a little girl with griefs greater than his own, and he felt a longing to comfort her and care for her, and as far as possible to be to her what Dick would have been.

"Was he older than I am?" was his first question.

"He was thirteen," said Evereld. "His birthday was in last September—on the 15th."

"And I was thirteen in September, too,—on the 9th," said Ralph.

"Only a week between you—how strange!" said Evereld. "And about soldiers he was just like you. When you rushed to the window this afternoon and saw

all the little details about the Horse Guards' uniforms, that I never much noticed before, you made me think of Dick directly. He was crazy about uniforms, and Bridget used to make them for him. We'll get her to make you one."

"Do you think she would?" said Ralph, forgetting his troubles. "We could act all sorts of things then, you know. Do you like acting?"

"I love the dressing-up part," said Evereld, "I don't much care about the talking, Dick used to do most of that."

"I'll do that part," said Ralph blithely, for although shy and reserved with his elders, he was never at a loss for words in a charade, and the two instantly fell to discussing future plans, forgetting every grief and care in the bliss of perfect companionship.

"Let us come down now," said Evereld, presently. "Geraghty promised to bring us whatever we liked. We'll sit on the lowest flight of stairs, you know, and he'll help us as the dishes come out of the dining-room. It's such fun. I always do it when there's a dinner-party."

Ralph consented willingly enough, and found something cheering in the general air of excitement that pervaded the house. They sat cosily on the rich stair carpet with its soft Eastern colouring, a funny little pair, he in his deep black, she in her white Indian muslin, watching the servants as they hurried to and fro, and

enjoying what Evereld termed "that nice sort of late-dinner smell."

"But it makes one awfully hungry," said Ralph, and the good-natured Geraghty, catching the words, murmured a comforting assurance as he passed by, "I'm coming to you directly, sir," and in a minute or two with a beaming face he reappeared with two delicious oyster patties.

"How clever you are, Geraghty," said the little girl. "You always know just what will be nicest."

Whether Geraghty had much regard for their powers of digestion may be doubted, but he took a rare delight in tempting them with every delicacy, from prawns in aspic, to that curious dish called "Angels on horse-back."

Ralph was half way through a huge helping of ice pudding when a momentary pang of doubt and reproach seized him. Ought he to be feasting on the very day of his father's funeral? Evereld saw the change in his face, and helped by what she had lately lived through, was able to read his thoughts. "Dick will be so glad that I've got you," she said, smiling, though Ralph fancied there were tears in her eyes. "I somehow think that your father and mine will be talking together to-night."

And those few comfortable words were more to the boy than any number of sermons on the resurrection; all his vague beliefs were freshened into living parts of

his everyday existence, and for the first time he knew for himself what had been to him hitherto merely things that others told him.

A sudden lull in the roar of voices from the dining-room now took place, after which the Babel of many tongues rose once more. "They are just beginning desert," said Evereld. "That was grace, and in a few minutes the ladies will be coming upstairs. I think we had better go to bed now."

So they parted, after having arranged that in the walking hour on the next morning, they would go together and sail Ralph's little schooner in St. James' Park.

CHAPTER IV.

“Of my grief (guess the length of the sword by the sheath’s);
By the silence of life, more pathetic than death’s!
Go—be clear of that day.”

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

THE Park seemed dull and well-nigh deserted when, at about ten o’clock on the following day, Fräulein Ellerbeck and the two children made their way to the water’s edge. Fräulein said she would establish herself on a seat in a sheltered nook not far off, and the children carried her book and her knitting-bag for her, chatting as they walked. Pacing slowly towards them was a figure which somehow arrested their attention.

“Why,” said Evereld, lowering her voice, “it is surely the man we saw as *Benedick*, last March, Fräulein. It’s Hugh Macneillie, the actor.”

Ralph looked curiously and with great interest at a member of the profession which had such charms for him.

Macneillie was a man of about seven and thirty, with chestnut-brown hair, strongly marked features, and a muscular, well-knit figure. About his clean-shaven face there was an air of profound gravity which surprised Ralph, who could not conceive how a man capable of acting *Benedick*, and noted for his subtle sense of

humour, could wear such an anxious and melancholy expression. He glanced at them with dreamy, absent eyes and paced slowly by.

Yet the little group had not been altogether lost on Hugh Macneillie in spite of the unseeing look in his eyes. He had carried away a curiously vivid impression of the two children, their black garments and their fresh young faces. He gave an impatient sigh, and paced on with quicker steps, yet turned again to walk by the side of the water, every now and then glancing at his watch with an air of vexation. He had been waiting there for a good hour, and he was in a mood which made waiting specially irksome.

"I will give her till half past ten," he thought to himself, and walked doggedly on, his face growing more and more haggard as the time passed by. At last the Westminster chimes rang out the half hour; he mechanically took out his watch again to verify the time, and setting his teeth hard, turned to go.

At that moment there suddenly appeared, walking towards him, a very beautiful woman. It was difficult to say precisely in what her great charm lay. Her every movement was full of grace, and although she was dressed with scrupulous quietness—indeed with a simplicity that was almost severe,—no one could have passed her by without a lingering glance. Her complexion was pale but very fair, her hair was like spun gold, contrasting curiously with the brown, deep-set eyes; and though the mouth was a little too wide and betrayed a

not over strong character, both face and manner were full of that indescribable fascination which carries all before it.

Macneillie, though he met her in the company of other people every day of his life, though he had known her more than ten years, went to meet her now with his heart throbbing painfully. She gave him a charming little greeting, and apologised prettily for being so unpunctual.

"It is Elizabeth's fault," she said, glancing at the maid who accompanied her. "She allowed me to oversleep myself. You can wait for me on that bench, Elizabeth, I shall not be long."

The maid walked back to the seat where Fräulein Ellerbeck sat with her knitting, and Macneillie, who had scarcely spoken a word as yet, broke the silence as they paced on together. "I had almost given you up," he said, a world of repressed impatience in his tone.

"That's the wisest thing I ever heard you say, Hugh," she replied lightly, though with a secret effort. "But you must go further. It must be not only almost, but altogether."

"Don't let us talk in parables," said Macneillie, passionately. "You can't compare an hour's waiting in a park with ten years waiting through the best part of a man's life."

A look of pain flashed across her face: there was remorse and tenderness in her voice as she replied.

But there was not the love he had once heard there, and he knew it well enough.

"Poor Hugh!" she said, "I have treated you very badly. But how am I to help myself. We have waited for each other, as you say, these ten years, but you know well enough that my father and mother will never consent. They have made up their minds that I shall make a very different marriage"

"In other words," said Macneillie between his teeth, "they have made up their minds to sell you to the highest bidder."

"No, no, you are so exaggerated, Hugh. Everyone can't look at the matter as you with your religious education in the Highlands look at it. Marriage is, after all, an arrangement affecting many people and interests. We are not living in a romance but in the prosaic nineteenth century. And I must not just please myself. I must think of what will best help on my career; my first duty is undoubtedly to help and to please my parents who have done so much for me."

"You didn't think so ten years ago," said Macneillie.

"Ten years ago I was a foolish girl of seventeen. You had been very good to me when the year before I had been taken straight from school and set down alone and friendless in a travelling company. It was natural enough that I should love you then, Hugh—you who shielded me and helped me."

"But later on," said Macneillie, clenching his hands, "when you no longer were lonely and friendless, when

fame had come to you and all the world was at your feet, you very naturally needed me no longer, and your love died. Mine was never that sort of love—it will always live.”

Christine Greville looked down with troubled face. Ambition and the importunities of her parents had for the time stifled her love. She felt cold and hard. His passionate constancy annoyed her. “I wish,” she said plaintively, “you would not speak like that, Hugh. I hate to think that I have pained you, or spoiled your life; but what am I to do? What am I to do?”

He turned to her eagerly.

“Be true to your best self, Christine. Trust the man who loved you long before this Sir Roderick Fenchurch had ever seen you. I’m not blind! I can see the advantages you might gain by marrying him! You would be very rich. You could have your own theatre, you would leap at once to a much higher position. But do you dream that such a marriage would be happy? Why, you have hardly a taste in common, and he is old enough to be your father.”

“Oh, as to happiness,” she said, impatiently, “I have long ceased to expect that. Don’t think me brutal if I speak plainly. I have had your love all these years, and it has not made me really happy. And if I married you, Hugh, I should not be happy at all. You are much too good for me, your standard of life is far too high. You would not be able to draw me up, and I

should be always longing to drag you down to my level. It would be a life of perpetual strain and tension."

"No, no," he cried passionately, and as he spoke he caught her hand in his as though he felt that she was slipping from him. "Together, darling, we should be happy, we should be strong to work for art's sake and for truth's sake—strong to fight all that is evil."

They had paused, and were standing now beside the railing that fenced off the grass and bushes, and within a stone's-throw of Ralph and Evereld; half unconsciously Macneillie watched the progress of the toy boat as the soft summer wind filled its white sails. At a little distance the ducks swam about the wooded island, and in the golden haze Queen Anne's Mansions loomed up impressively like some great fortress.

"But I don't want to toil and to struggle like that," said his companion, petulantly. "Every word you say only proves to me how far we have drifted apart, Hugh. You have a sort of ideal of me in your mind not in the least like the true Christine. I tell you I am tired of all your ideals and aims and dreams of raising the drama. That is not what I care for. I care for success and applause—yes I do, don't interrupt me. I care for them, and I must have them. And I want a better position, and I want much, much more money. I want other things, too, which you can never give me. You'll never be a rich man, Hugh, it's somehow not in you; you'll never push your way to the very front of the profession. But I must do that, nothing but the very

first place will satisfy me. I have ten times your ambition."

"By that sin fell the angels," said Macneillie.

"Don't quote Shakspeare, we have enough of him every evening," she said, forcing a laugh. "And for me, I am not an angel, as you very well know. Come, let us make an end of this useless talk. My father is at this moment discussing settlements with Sir Roderick, and in a day or two all the world will know that the marriage is arranged."

Macneillie's lips moved but no words would come—he breathed hard.

"Don't look like that, Hugh," she exclaimed. "We shall often see each other; we shall be the best of friends; and when I have my own theatre, why, you shall be the first to find a place in the company."

A look of hot anger flashed across Macneillie's haggard face.

"Do you think I would accept such a post?" he said, indignantly. "For what do you take me?" Then, his tone softening to tender reproach, "You don't understand a man's love—you don't understand!"

"Perhaps I don't understand it," she said, looking rather nettled; "but I have met plenty of men who were dying for love of me one month and raving about someone else the next. There, I must go home. Talking only makes matters worse. Go and take a good walk, Hugh, or you will act abominably to-night. *Au revoir!*"

She beckoned to her maid and turned away abruptly,

anxious to put an end to an interview which had been trying to both of them. Her face was grave and downcast as she walked, and more than once she sighed heavily. She had never been formally betrothed to Macneillie, but there had been a private engagement between them, and she had spoken quite truly when she said that his care during her girlhood had shielded her from many perils. Her love for him had been very real; she had struggled long against the opposition of her parents, but at last her strength had failed, and little by little she had yielded to the influence which by degrees had paralysed her powers of loving.

"Poor Hugh," she thought to herself, remorsefully. "He is terribly cut up. But I was never good enough for him. Sir Roderick and the low level will suit me much better."

After he was left alone, Macneillie did not move for some minutes. He just leant on the iron fence with clenched hands and set face, despair in his heart. The voices of the two children to the right fell on his ear, mingling strangely with his miserable thoughts.

"I shall lose her! I shall lose her!" cried the boy in a tragic voice.

"How came you to let go of the string?" asked his small companion.

"I had forgotten all about it; I was thinking of those people. Hurrah! the wind is shifting; she is coming nearer. I do believe I could reach her with my stick."

Macneillie watched the boy's strenuous efforts to re-

capture the tiny craft, which seemed almost within his reach, yet somehow always eluded him. Suddenly, at the very moment when his stick had touched the boat, he lost his balance and fell headlong over the low foot-rail into the water.

Macneillie had hurried to the rescue before Evereld's cry of terror had reached Fräulein Ellerbeck. He lifted out the dripping boy and laid him on the path, and Ralph, recovering from the shock and rubbing his wet eyelashes, looked up to find a grave face bending over him and to meet the inquiry of the kindest blue-grey eyes he had ever seen.

"None the worse for your bath, I hope?" said Macneillie, smiling a little.

"No, thank you," said Ralph, struggling to his feet and looking very much like Johnnie Head-in-air when "with hooks the two strong men hooked poor Johnnie out again." "It was awfully good of you to help me," he added, gratefully.

"And now let us rescue the boat," said Macneillie, winning golden opinions from the children by the real pains he took to capture the *Queen Mab*, and the same from Fräulein Ellerbeck by his courteous farewell.

"So few Englishmen," she remarked, "know how to bow. You must take a lesson from him, Ralph."

"And, oh, Fräulein," said Evereld, as they walked briskly home, that Ralph might change his clothes, "did you see what a long time Miss Christine Greville stayed talking to him? And part of the time they were quite

close to us, and we heard her say that soon every one would know she was to be married—I think, to some very rich man—and she would have a theatre of her own, and Mr. Macneillie should act there.”

“You should not have listened, my dears,” said Fräulein Ellerbeck, uneasily.

“But, indeed, Fräulein, we couldn’t help it; her voice was so very, very clear, it reached us every word just like raindrops pattering on leaves.”

“And so did his voice too,” said Ralph. “He seemed quite angry when she said that. He said he would never accept such a post, and that she didn’t a bit understand how he loved her.”

“Well, well,” said Fräulein, “let us say no more about it now; and be sure you never repeat what you accidentally overheard. It may be a secret from people in general, and it would be more honourable if you treated it as a secret.”

The children promised that they would do so, but, like the celebrated parrot, though they said nothing, they thought the more, and Macneillie became their great hero. Through him they had both received their first glimpse into the unknown region where men and women loved and suffered; and, since they both were missing the familiar home life and the close companionship of parents, they seized eagerly on this new outlet for certain feelings of reverence and hero-worship which they both possessed.

Could the actor have known what sympathy and

devotion these two felt for him, or how real was their childish love and admiration, he would have felt, even at that bitter time in his life, a touch of amused gratitude and wonder. Wholly unknown to himself he was filling the minds of two somewhat desolate little mortals, brightening their tedious days, and drawing them out of themselves and their own troubles.

Often, in after years, they would laugh to think what pleasure they had found in running downstairs before the breakfast gong had sounded, that they might get possession of the *Times* and see the announcement of "Hamlet," in which Macneillie was appearing. And one morning it chanced that their two smiling faces were still bent over the paper when Sir Matthew came into the room.

"Well," he said, kindly, "what good news have you found?"

For once Ralph forgot the shy stiffness of manner which usually crept over him at his guardian's approach.

"Oh," he said, in an eager boyish way, "we were just looking at the cast for 'Hamlet.'"

"To be sure. I had quite forgotten that you were stage-struck, and that I had promised you to go to see Washington. You must get Fräulein Ellerbeck to take you some day."

"We would much rather see Macneillie," said Evereld, "for it was Macneillie, you know, who helped Ralph out when he tumbled into the water."

"Very well," said Sir Matthew, "then do that in-

stead. Fräulein Ellerbeck, will you take tickets for them?—and the sooner the better, for I hear there has been a great run on the seats there since the announcement of Miss Greville's marriage. She's to marry Sir Roderick Fenchurch at the end of the season."

Ralph and Evereld having poured forth delighted thanks, discreetly kept silence when the conversation turned on Miss Greville's betrothal.

"They say, you know," said Janet, "that it is a great surprise to everyone, and that it was always supposed she would marry Macneillie."

And in response to this everyone had something to say about the probability or the improbability of such a story, save the two children who, with a proud pleasure in feeling that Macneillie's secret was safe in their keeping, went on eating bacon with the most absolute control of countenance.

When the eagerly awaited day at length arrived and the two hero-worshippers were sitting in bliss at the theatre, they found some difficulty at first in recognising Macneillie. He was just the Danish prince and no one else. It was only when both hero and heroine were called before the curtain, that they could at all think of him as the same man they had seen a few weeks before in St. James' Park.

As he led forward Miss Greville the contrast between them was curiously marked. She, with her smiling face, her air of perfect ease and content, seemed thoroughly to enjoy the warm reception. He, on the other hand,

merely bowed mechanically, and looked as if this interlude were highly distasteful to him; the children could have fancied that he was positively nervous, though they doubted whether an experienced actor could really know what nervousness meant.

After that call before the curtain they lost the sense that *Hamlet* himself was actually present; always through the passionate scenes and the tragic death which followed, it was not entirely *Hamlet*, but Macneillie with his own personal troubles that they saw; they wondered much how he could get through his part, and more and more after that day his name continually recurred in their talk, in their games, and even in their prayers.

Just at the close of the season they saw him once again. Fräulein Ellerbeck had promised that on the first fine Saturday they should go to Richmond Park, taking their lunch with them. They had learnt from the conversation of their elders at the breakfast table that it was the very day on which Miss Christine Greville was to marry Sir Roderick Fenchurch. The marriage was to take place at a small country church, and was to be of a strictly private character. They had talked of it more than once as they sat at lunch under the trees in the park, and early in the afternoon as they wandered along the quiet paths and watched the deer grazing peacefully, their minds were full of their hero and his trouble. Suddenly Evereld gripped hold of her companion's arm.

"Look!" she exclaimed in a low voice. "Is it not Mr. Macneillie?"

Ralph's heart beat fast as he glanced at the approaching figure. Had their incessant thought of him conjured up a sort of vision of the actor? Or was it indeed himself? Nearer approach answered the question plainly enough. It was undoubtedly Macneillie, but there was something in his ghastly face which struck terror into the boy's heart, it reminded him of that awful shadow of death which he had seen stealing over his father on that last never-to-be-forgotten day. Apparently quite unconscious of their presence, Macneillie passed by, but in a minute Ralph, to the amazement of Fräulein Ellerbeck and Evereld, had rushed back and overtaken him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, panting a little; "but I am the boy you saved the other day in St. James' Park. And—and please will you take this knife as a remembrance."

He thrust into Macneillie's hand a little old-fashioned silver fruit-knife which had belonged to his father.

The actor evidently dragged himself back with an effort to the world of realities. He looked in a puzzled way at the boy and at the embossed handle of the knife.

"You are very good," he said in a perplexed tone. "Yes, yes, I remember you now—you and your boat. But I don't like to take your knife away from you."

"But, indeed, I never use it; I always eat peel and

all," said Ralph with an earnestness which brought a smile to Macneillie's face. "We went to see you as *Hamlet*, and you were splendid! Please take it. You don't know how awfully I like you."

Macneillie's eyes gave him a kindly glance and his cold fingers closed over the boy's small hot hand in a hearty grip.

"Then I will certainly use it," he said. "It shall travel in my pocket for the rest of my life. But only on condition that you take this. Don't get into mischief with it."

And with a smile he put into his hand a clasp-knife, and while Ralph was still lost in admiration of the longest and sharpest blade he had ever seen, Macneillie passed rapidly on and disappeared among the trees.

"Oh, Ralph, how delightful!" cried Evereld, as the boy rejoined them.

"How could you be so brave as to go up and speak to him?"

"I'm awfully glad he took the fruit-knife," said Ralph. "But I wish he hadn't given me this. It's such a beauty and I had done nothing for him."

"Perhaps you had," said Fräulein Ellerbeck, thoughtfully. "The unseen and unrealised help is often the most real help of all."

CHAPTER V.

"The recognition of his rights therefore, the justice he requires of our hands or our thoughts, is the recognition of that which the person, in his inmost nature, really is; and as sympathy alone can discover that which really is in matters of feeling and thought, true justice is in its essence a finer knowledge through love."

"Appreciations," WALTER PATER.

SIX years after that memorable August day, Ralph and Evereld might have been seen on the tennis-ground attached to the pretty house near Redvale, which Sir Matthew was pleased to call his "little country cottage."

It was decidedly one of those cottages of gentility which once caused the devil to grin. But in spite of that it was a very charming place. Its windows commanded an exquisite view over the hills and woods of one of the southern counties, and its gardens were the admiration of the whole neighbourhood. The tennis-lawn lay to the left of the house in a cosy nook of its own, and there was no one to see the vigorous game which the two were playing. This was a pity, for the play was skilful and dainty to watch, and the players themselves were worth looking at.

Ralph, who had been a remarkably small boy, was never likely, as Geraghty expressed it, to be "six foot long and broad," but he had developed into a well-pro-

portioned, healthy-looking fellow, and still retained his open, boyish face, expressive brown eyes, and thick, wavy brown hair. Evereld was even less changed, she was still very small and young for her age; and although she was fast approaching her eighteenth birthday she wore the sort of nondescript dress which girls often wear during their last year in the schoolroom, her skirt revealing a pair of pretty ankles, and her hair still hanging down her back.

The contest was an exciting one, but it ended in a victory for Ralph, whose greater strength usually conquered.

"I am heavily handicapped," said Evereld, throwing up her racket with a laugh. "We'll borrow the vicar's cassock and the Lord Chancellor's wig and you shall play a set in them and see if I don't beat you then!"

"Come and rest," said Ralph, strolling towards the little shady arbour at the side of the lawn. "The sun is grilling."

"You would find it worse if you had all this weight to endure," said Evereld, shaking back the cloud of nut-brown hair which hung over her shoulders. "I shall take to plaiting it up, then at least one would be cool."

"No, don't!" protested Ralph. "You'll never look half as nice afterwards. And besides, when girls do up their hair they always leave off being natural and get grown-up and horrid, and can't talk sense to a fellow."

"My hair has nothing to do with being natural," said Evereld, fanning herself with a big fern. "How could I

help being natural with you, when we have been together all this long time? How I do wish I were a boy and might have gone in for the Indian Civil, too. By-the-bye, Ralph, is that to-day's paper? Is there any news about your exam.?"

"They sent the wrong paper," said Ralph taking it up. "See, it's last night's *Evening Standard* instead of this morning's; they have been taking a nap down at the bookstall. I wonder if there really is anything in at last. It seems hard lines to keep us on tenterhooks from the 1st June till August."

"I don't believe you have worried about it. Your head was full of those private theatricals the moment the exam. was over. How well they went off! I never saw Sir Matthew so nice to you. He really did for once appreciate you."

"That was because other people praised me," said Ralph. "He would never have said one word of his own accord. You'll never find him committing himself before he knows whether he will be swimming with the stream."

"Ralph, do you know I think you are growing rather hard. I hate to hear you say things like that about Sir Matthew. If Fräulein were here she would have a hundred instances of his kindness to tell us."

"Yes, she would," owned Ralph. "She has been our good angel all these years. Worse luck to that old professor who married her and left us to ourselves. Why, Evereld, just look at it in that way. What should you

and I have been like if all this time we had only had the sort of indifferent cold charity which the Mactavishes have given us? Oh, I know there has been money spent on me; do you think I have ever been allowed to forget that for a moment? But Sir Matthew spoils with one hand the good he does with the other. Thank heaven, I shall soon be on my own hook. I wonder what life out in India will be like—and what the chances of getting any cricket are?”

Evereld fell to talking of happy reminiscences of Simla, and they were planning all manner of impossible arrangements for the future, in which they fondly imagined their present brotherly and sisterly relations would be maintained, when Bridget suddenly appeared upon the scene.

“Miss Evereld,” she exclaimed, “you’d best be coming in to change your frock, my dear. Sir Matthew has come down without any warning from London. He’s in the library, Mr. Ralph, and they did tell me he was askin’ for you. Geraghty he just passed me the word that he thought Sir Matthew was troubled in his mind about some little matter.”

Ralph flushed.

“You see now,” he exclaimed, turning to Evereld, “if I haven’t gone and failed in that wretched exam.! What on earth shall I do if I have?”

“Why, you will go in for it again next year,” said Evereld philosophically. “But who says you have failed? It may be nothing to do with the exam. Besides, you

know that your coach and Professor Rosenwald and Fräulein—I mean Frau Rosenwald—all thought you were safe to pass.”

“I know I had worked hard,” said Ralph. “Well, let me go and hear the worst at once.”

“Don’t despair so soon. As for me, I believe you have passed, and that it is only some business matter that’s worrying Sir Matthew. Good luck to you. Don’t stay long in the library. I shall be dressed in ten minutes.”

She waved her hand gaily and ran upstairs, while Ralph, with a great dread hanging over him, went to the library.

With other people he was invariably cheerful and talkative, but with Sir Matthew he was never his best self. To begin with, he was always ill at ease, and by a sort of fate he seemed destined to say and do exactly what would annoy his patron. If he was silent, Sir Matthew was in the habit of rating him for his dulness. If he laughed and talked, he was ordered not to make so much noise. If he hazarded an opinion he was sure to meet with a snub, and at all times and seasons he was hedged in by significant reminders that he was eating the bread of charity. It was well for him that he had seen comparatively little of the Mactavishes, thanks to his life at Winchester and to his friendship with Evereld and her governess; but he had seen enough to do him considerable harm and to plant seeds of

pride, and hardness, and distrust of humanity in his heart.

Sir Matthew was sitting at his bureau. He glanced up as the door opened, bestowed a curt nod upon Ralph and went on writing in silence.

"They told me you were inquiring for me," said Ralph nervously, noting at once the storm-signals in Sir Matthew's face.

"I did send for you," said the master of the house grimly, as he signed his name with two flourishing M's, and methodically folded, directed and stamped his dispatch.

Ralph, horribly chafed by the manner of his reception and by the suspense, turned to the window and took up a newspaper which was lying near it.

"Put that down," thundered Sir Matthew, as though he had been ordering a child of four years old.

"Sir?" said Ralph, in angry astonishment.

"Do you think I don't understand your game," said Sir Matthew. "You are pretending to look for news of your examination when all the time you perfectly well know that you have failed."

"Failed!" cried Ralph turning pale, and realising how little he had believed in failure when he had talked of the possibility with Evereld. "Who says I have failed? Where are the lists?"

He snatched at the paper again, neither heeding Sir Matthew's orders nor his scoffing laugh. Here was the list of the successful candidates, and with eager eyes he

looked down it. The name of Denmead was not there.

Sir Matthew silently watched his expression of bewildered despair, but though it would have appealed to some men it did not appeal to him.

"Now that the newspaper corroborates what I told you, perhaps you believe my word," he said sarcastically.

"I beg your pardon," said Ralph, "I did not mean to doubt you—but the shock——"

"Now my good fellow, you may as well be silent, the less said about a shock the better; you know perfectly well that you never deserved to pass that examination. You had idled away your time over cricket and theatricals, and now you have to face the consequences."

"You are the first person to say that," said Ralph, resentfully. "They all told me I had an excellent chance and was well prepared."

"The examiners, however, thought differently," said Sir Matthew; "your work was miserable. I have this very day been making special inquiries into the matter, that I may not judge you unfairly. You have not only failed, but failed ignominiously. Don't fidget about while I am talking to you; sit down and listen to me, for I have much to say."

Ralph forced himself to obey in silence.

"I am perfectly well aware," resumed Sir Matthew, "that nowadays young men think nothing of failing, that they go in for an examination time after time with

light hearts while their unfortunate fathers have to pay the piper. You were not in a position to behave in that fashion. And you would have shown, I think, a finer sense of honour if you had worked well."

"I did work," said Ralph emphatically. "If you——"

Sir Matthew raised his long hand and waved it downwards in a silencing manner that was peculiarly his own.

"I say nothing," he continued, in his cool, measured tone, "as to what I might have expected after the large sum I have thrown away on your schooling at Winchester; I say nothing as to the three months in Germany and the special coach I provided for you; I say nothing of the manner in which I took you at once into my own house when there was no one to stand by you; I say nothing as to the fatherly care I have bestowed on you all these——"

He broke off abruptly, for Ralph, with the look of one goaded past bearing, had sprung to his feet.

"No," he cried passionately, "at least that word you shall not use; there was never anything fatherly about you. All those other things that you cast in my teeth though you say you won't mention them—they are true enough, and I have tried to be grateful—I—" he half choked in the desperate struggle between his pride and a certain sense of courtesy which still clung to him—"I will try always to be grateful." He strode across the room to the window, panting for air. A chuckle escaped Sir Matthew.

"You were always a good hand at acting," he remarked, "but I shall be obliged if you will come down from your high horse and remember that I am talking about a business arrangement. Don't waste my time, but listen to what I have to say to you."

Ralph paced back again to the hearthrug and stood there, looking steadily down at his patron. It somehow seemed as if in those few moments he had passed from boyhood altogether, even Sir Matthew noted the change in his look and bearing. "The only thing," he resumed, "in which I ever saw you really exert yourself was in that play at the end of the season. I quite admit that you learnt the part of *Charles Surface* at very short notice and that you acted it far better than any amateur I ever had the pain of watching. But to play a part in 'The School for Scandal' is one thing, and to be fit to play your part in life is another. You will never, I am convinced, be sharp enough for the Indian Civil Service, I shall not permit you to go in again for it next year. I have already wasted too much upon you and shall not throw good money after bad. That's always a mistake."

Ralph could not calmly stand by and hear his whole future overturned without a word; he broke in eagerly, perhaps rashly. "Yet many have failed the first time and afterwards turned out well," he pleaded. "The standard of age, too, is likely to be raised they say. I would work my hardest. If you will let me try

again——” But once more Sir Matthew gave that expressive downward wave of the hand.

“No,” he said peremptorily. “You have had your chance and lost it. Still, I am loth to turn my back altogether on an old friend’s son, and for my own satisfaction I offer you one more opportunity. I will make a parson of you. Do you remember that snug little vicarage up in the north of England where last year we went to call on a Mr. Crosbie? Years ago the Mac-tavishes owned the living; it had been in the family for generations. My father at a time when he was pressed for money sold it to old Crosbie. I have long wished to have the property again, and only to-day Crosbie happened to be in town and I got him to promise me that if I bought the living he would undertake to retire in four years. You had better not tell it in Gath, for of course the promise to retire is a strictly private matter, but for the rest it’s all legal enough. Next month you will be twenty. In four years you could be ordained priest, and I will undertake to see you through your training and to put you into this living. It’s three hundred and a house; you could be happy enough up there, and for your father’s sake I am willing to do as much as that for you.”

There was something so artificial in those last words that Ralph, whose anger had been rising every moment, now broke forth indignantly.

“Is it for his sake that you put before me a temptation of this sort? You surely know—you must know—

that my father would never have accepted a living obtained in that way. Had you offered it him, and had it been worth ten times the money, he would not have touched it with a pair of tongs. Why, the thing is rank simony!"

"You receive offers of help in a somewhat curious fashion, young man," said Sir Matthew with a sneer. "But in spite of that I still think you are very well cut out for a parson. Your dramatic instincts and your good voice would fit you well enough for the Church, and you are already able, I perceive, to preach to your elders and betters."

Ralph winced at the sarcasm, but he caught hold of the weak point in his opponent's argument.

"No," he said, emphatically, "I am not fit for the work of a clergyman. The only thing that can fit a man for that is a distinct call from God. You are tempting me to go in for the loaves and fishes, and you dare to say that you do this for my father's sake—my father, who would have starved first!"

"Perhaps he would," said Sir Matthew coldly. "He was, as all his friends knew, an unpractical fool. You needn't look as if you could kill me. He had excellent abilities but no power of pushing his way, and he left you a beggar in consequence, proving, according to scripture, that as he had neglected to secure future provision for his family he had denied the faith and was worse than an infidel. Now, to return to business; are you going to accept this offer of mine, or do you intend

to be a pig-headed idiot, and affect to be calling a mere matter of business simony?"

Ralph's eyes lighted up.

"I mean," he said quietly, "to be true to my father's ideals."

Sir Matthew broke into a discordant laugh.

"Did his precious ideals feed you and clothe you and send you to Winchester? Don't you know by his own confession that he had mismanaged his affairs?"

"I know," said Ralph indignantly, "that, whatever his faults, he was at least an honest man."

He had meant no insinuation whatever, but the words galled his companion terribly. Sir Matthew rose to his feet in a towering passion.

"You impertinent, ungrateful fellow, do you dare to insult me in my own house? Go, sir, get out of my sight! I have had enough of you. Let us see now how your ideals will support you! Leave my house and never set foot in it again!"

Ralph, too angry and sore to realise all that the words meant, turned without a word and left the library.

CHAPTER VI.

“The grace of friendship—mind and heart,
Linked with their fellow heart and mind;
The gains of science, gifts of art;
The sense of oneness with our kind;
The thirst to know and understand—
A large and liberal discontent:
These are the goods in life’s rich hand,
The things that are more excellent.”

WILLIAM WATSON.

THE moment the door had closed behind the boy Sir Matthew’s anger cooled. For the time it had been genuine, for quite unintentionally Ralph had used words which stung him as no others could have done. There were two things in the world that the company promoter sincerely cared about—successful speculation, and his reputation as a philanthropist. His adoption of Ralph had been almost entirely a speculation, one of the specious bits of kindness which he had intended to redound to his own honour and glory. Having once undertaken the lad’s education he could not for his own credit’s sake turn back, but from the very first he had shrewdly guessed that it would prove a bad investment, and Ralph had been a thorn in his side. To begin with, the boy was in face curiously like his father, and Sir Matthew had some lingering remains of affection for

his old friend, even though in his heart he despised him for not being more of a man of the world. He had not lived the life of a company promoter without having grown perfectly callous to the sufferings of his victims, but yet the conscience that was not dead but dormant within him had been faintly stirred at Whinhaven when he realised that the Rector's ruin had been his work. Partly to salve his conscience, but chiefly because the world would applaud the action, he had adopted Ralph. The boy, however, had not taken kindly to the part assigned him. He never showed off well before visitors, never learnt to pose as a grateful recipient of unmerited kindness. On the contrary, Sir Matthew always had an uncomfortable feeling that Ralph saw through him, and knew him to be a humbug. As a matter of fact, the taunting allusions he had just made to Mr. Denmead's mistakes and errors of judgment had driven his hearer far from all recollection of Sir Matthew's actions or character; Ralph had thought only of that inward picture stamped indelibly upon his brain of the high-minded and scrupulously honourable father, who somehow seemed to him more of a living reality as he spoke than the angry, self-important patron confronting him.

"He was at least an honest man!" The words had intended no reflection on Sir Matthew, but they had gone straight to the company promoter's one vulnerable spot, and for the moment had sharply pained him. Incensed at the perception that this fellow might hurt his jealously guarded reputation,—that reputation for

benevolence which was part of his stock-in-trade, he had burst forth into angry denunciation, and in one indignant sentence had severed all connection between them.

He took out a memorandum book now, and made an entry in it with much deliberation, then sat for some time wrapped in thought, gnawing absently at his pencil case, a trick which he had acquired, and of which the dented surface of the silver bore tokens.

"One may trust a Denmead to be honourable," he reflected with a curious sense of satisfaction. "The boy will never mention that little private arrangement as to Crosbie's retiring in four years. I have bought the living and now the question is how can I use it best to further my own ends? After all, it's just as well that this fool has refused it. I can use it as a bait for someone else, and I'm quit of Ralph for ever. Though the boy is so like his father in face there's much more go in him than there ever was in poor Denmead. He has a bit of the sturdy pluck and energy of his little Welsh mother. Pshaw! I needn't trouble about him. He's the sort that will swim and not sink, and a little course of starvation will bring him down from his impossible heights and teach him that he must do as other men do."

With that he rose and left the library in search of his wife, and having chatted pleasantly enough with her at afternoon tea, he casually alluded to Ralph's departure.

"What!" said Lady Mactavish, "Is he going out to India, do you mean."

"Not that I know of," said Sir Matthew with a laugh. "He has failed ignominiously in his examination, and has been most insufferably impertinent to me. I have given him his *congé*, and he will trouble us no more."

"The ungrateful boy!" said Lady Mactavish indignantly, "after all that you have done for him too."

"He has behaved very badly," said Sir Matthew; "and I think, my dear, we are well quit of him. I shall not see him again, but you had better just say good-bye to him, and by-the-bye, I think you might give him a couple of five-pound notes; I should be sorry to launch him into the world without a penny in his pockets. It might make people think that I had been harsh with him."

Ralph had gone straight up to the schoolroom in search of Evereld, but something had delayed her and he found the place deserted. Throwing himself down on the window-seat, he let the soft west wind cool his flushed face and tried to think calmly over the interview with Sir Matthew. The attack on his father had angered him as nothing else could have done, and it was over this rather than over his own future that he mused. The sound of Evereld's voice singing in the passage roused him, but before she had reached the schoolroom, the red baize door leading from the other

part of the house creaked on its hinges, and Lady Mactavish appeared upon the scene.

"I was looking for you, Ralph," she said, entering the room in front of Evereld. "I learn, to my great annoyance, that you have failed in your examination, failed ignominiously. It is quite clear to us all that you have not been working properly."

"But everyone says that the Indian Civil is such a dreadfully stiff exam.," said Evereld, "and he did work very hard in Germany; they all said so."

"Don't interrupt me, my dear," said Lady Mactavish. "It is not a matter you can understand. After all that Sir Matthew had done for you, Ralph, I think at least you might have behaved properly to him. He tells me that you were so impertinent that he has been forced to order you out of the house."

"I had no intention of being rude," said Ralph, standing before her with much the same expression of impatience, curbed by a sense of obligation with which he had always taken her fault-finding.

"I am quite aware that your intentions are always, according to your own account, immaculate," she said scathingly, "but, unfortunately, your words and actions don't correspond with them. You have behaved abominably to the man who has fed, and clothed, and housed you all these years, a man who has wasted hundreds of pounds on your schooling."

"Believe me, I do not forget what he has done for me," said Ralph eagerly. "I am grateful for it. But

he used words of my father which were cruel, words which no son could patiently have listened to."

"Nothing can excuse the way you have behaved," said Lady Mactavish, "so say no more about it. What are your plans?"

"I have made none," said Ralph, "except to go by the six o'clock train."

"Where are you going?"

"To London," he replied.

Lady Mactavish glanced at him a little uneasily. She could not without prickings of conscience think of turning this boy adrift.

"Sir Matthew, with his usual kindness and generosity, asked me to give you these," she said, holding out the bank-notes. "Though you have so much disappointed and pained him, he will not let you be sent away without money."

But Ralph drew back; there was a look in his eyes which half frightened Evereld.

"Thank you," he said, "but I cannot take them; after what passed just now in the library it is out of the question."

Lady Mactavish looked uncomfortable. "You have been so shielded and cared for that you don't realise what the world is. You will certainly be getting into trouble. I desire you to take these."

"I am sorry to refuse you anything," he said with studied politeness. "But you ask what is impossible."

"Your pride is perfectly ridiculous," she said, turn-

ing away with a look of annoyance. "However, I shall retain these notes for you, and when you have realised your foolishness, you can write and ask me for them."

Something in her tone touched Ralph. It seemed to him that perhaps after all she had taken some little thought for his well-being, and that behind her grumbling, ungracious manner, there was more real heart than he had dreamed.

"Will you not let me say good-bye to you?" he said. "You must not think I am ungrateful for the home you have given me all these years."

She took leave of him more kindly than he had expected, after which he turned thoughtfully back into the schoolroom, where he found poor Evereld sobbing her heart out.

"Oh, don't cry," he said as if the sight of her tears had added the last straw to his burden. "It can't be helped, Evereld, and after all, had I got through my exam. I should have been going abroad before so very long. And you are going to school for a year. There will be no end of friends for you there."

"They won't be like you," sobbed Evereld. "You are just like my brother now. Oh, how I wish we were really brother and sister, then they couldn't turn you out like this."

"I wish we were," said Ralph with a sigh, as he realised how utterly he had now cut himself off from intercourse with her. All we can do, I suppose, is to hear of each other through the Professor and Frau

Rosenwald. They will never let me write to you at school. It's not as if I were your brother really or even your cousin. They're awfully strict at schools about that."

"Well," said Evereld, resolutely drying her eyes. "We can write in the holidays, and in a little more than three years' time I can do just exactly what I like. Promise, Ralph, that you will come to me when I am one and twenty. Promise me faithfully."

"I promise," he said. But as he spoke it seemed to him that by that time a thousand things might have happened to divide them. He had a perception somehow that, once broken, that brotherly and sisterly intimacy could never again be the same thing. Later on, Evereld knew that it was indeed at an end, but for the moment his promise cheered her, and she set herself to work to make the most of the present. "Come," she said, "tea is getting cold, and you must eat all you can, for who knows where you will dine. Oh, Ralph! what do you mean to do? Where shall you go in London?"

"I think I shall go first to my father's solicitor, old Mr. Marriott. He was kind to me when I left Whinhaven, and he will know the whole truth about things, and will perhaps advise me."

"Shall you go in for the Indian Civil again?"

"I don't think so, for most likely all that part is true enough. I must have failed badly; I never was any good at exams. No, I have a great idea of trying my luck

on the stage. That was always my wish since the day when my father took me to see Washington. We often laughed over the plan and discussed it, and he had none of that horror of the stage which so many parsons profess to have."

"That would be delightful,—a thousand times better than going to India! And perhaps we shall go to see you act. And oh! perhaps you'll get to know Macneillie!"

"I have no idea where Macneillie has gone to," said Ralph. "He has not played in London for the last six years; somebody told me he had started a Company of his own in the provinces. It wouldn't be a bad idea to find out, and write to him. Unless our hero-worship threw a very deceptive halo round him, he must be an awfully kind-hearted man. Come! drink to my good fortune, and then like an angel just help me to sort out my things. Tea, and this notion of yours about Macneillie make me feel like a giant refreshed. After all, it will be jolly enough to be on one's own hook after eating the bitter bread of charity all this time."

"Yet I rather wish you had taken those bank notes," said Evereld. "How much money have you, Ralph, to start with?"

He felt in one pocket and produced a florin. "That will take me to London," he said. He felt in another and produced half a sovereign, "on that I can live for a week," he remarked.

"And after that?" said Evereld.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There are night refuges I believe, where for a penny one can lie in a box and warm oneself with a leather coverlet. And failing these, there is always the Park, where you can enjoy part of a bench without any charge at all."

"Ralph, I'm not going to allow it," said Evereld, her firm little mouth assuming its most resolute expression. "Do you think I should have let Dick go away to starve upon twelve shillings while I was lapped in luxury? I took you for my brother, the very first night you came, and I'm not going to give you up, whatever you say." She unlocked her desk and took out four sovereigns. "This is all I have left of my allowance; I wish it were bank notes like the ones you refused. But you can't refuse mine, Ralph."

He hesitated. "I don't think I ought to take them," he said.

"Why not?"

"The world would be shocked. What right have I to your money?"

"Every right, since we belong to each other. And as to the world it has nothing whatever to do with the matter. Don't waste time, Ralph. Please take it for my sake."

He could not resist the blue eyes brimming with tears, but let her place the money in his hand and gave her a brotherly hug. Then they hastily began to collect

his possessions, talking bravely of the future, and many times alluding to their old hero Macneillie.

In the meantime in Geraghty's pantry two other friends were colloquing; Bridget having learnt the fate that was to befall her young gentleman was opening her heart to her elderly *fiancé*.

"It's turnin' of him out that they're after," she said indignantly, "And him a fine handsome boy and knowin' just nothin' of the world. Sure thin, Geraghty, it's a sin, it's just a mortal sin, and him without connictions, let alone relations."

"Where will he be goin'?" asked Geraghty thoughtfully.

"I heard them say he was goin' to London, and you know what that will be meanin' when a boy's got neither money nor friends to keep him in the right way. It breaks me heart to think of it."

"Well, maybe I'd better be tellin' him of Dan Doolan's house at Vauxhall. He'd be with good dacent folk there and they'd not be askin' a high rint. Here, give me that tray. I'll fetch down the schoolroom cups for ye, and that'll give me a chance to speak with him."

Geraghty had always been a favourite in the schoolroom, and Ralph turned to the old fellow now with a hearty appreciation of his kindly thoughtfulness.

"We shall all miss you, Mr. Ralph," he said. "And if I might make so bold as to be giving you the ricomindation of some rooms in London, where they tell me you're going, I think you'd find them respectable,

which is more than can be said for many places. The house belongs to Dan Doolan, that's my sister's husband's uncle, he and his wife are very dacent folk and they would do their utmost for you and give you a warm welcome."

"Trust the Irish for that," said Ralph, "I'm very much obliged to you, Geraghty, for I hadn't an idea where to look for lodgings. Come, Evereld, now you will feel much happier about me."

He took down the address, and then, with the help of Geraghty and Bridget and Evereld, the packing was finished and the moment of leave-taking arrived. The butler had carried down the last portmanteau, Bridget had invoked blessings on his head and gone away wiping her eyes with her apron, and the two friends were left in the quiet schoolroom.

"Remember your promise," said Evereld earnestly.

"I will remember," said Ralph. "And after all it is likely enough that we shall meet before that. Courage, dear! Don't fret. The time will soon pass."

"Here is a book for you to read in the train," she added, afraid to say much, lest she should break down. "You must have a Dickens to comfort you, and this will be the best, for the wind is very much in the east to-day, as dear old Mr. Jarndyce would have said."

She gave him her own copy of "Bleak House" and Ralph, with a choking sensation in his throat, bent down and kissed the sweet rosy face that was still so child-

like. After that, without another word, he left the house, and Evereld, running to her bedroom, watched him until he had disappeared in the distance, then, throwing herself on the bed, cried as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER VII.

“Is our age an age of genuine pity? I have my doubts. It is pre-eminently an age of bustle, and fuss, and fidget; but I think we are lacking in tenderness.”—DR. JESSOP.

AFTER the pain of his farewells had begun to wear off a little, Ralph, being naturally of a hopeful temperament, turned not without some pleasurable feelings to the thought of the future that lay before him. More and more his old dreams of becoming an actor filled his mind, and in the sudden change which had befallen his fortunes he saw something not unlike a distinct call to return to his first ideal. He clung all the more to the thought because of the uprooting he had just undergone, and as he travelled through the Surrey hills on that summer evening, found comfort in the anchorage of a firm resolve to do all that was in his power to fit himself for his new vocation. That one did not climb the ladder at a bound he of course knew well enough, and he had sense to guess that it would be a difficult matter to get room even on the lowest step of the ladder. A hard struggle lay before him, but he was full of vigorous young life and did not shrink from the prospect. Then, too, he was keenly conscious of the relief of no longer depending upon the Mactavishes.

He could exactly sympathise with Esther in "Bleak House," who was always sensible of filling a place in her godmother's establishment which ought to have been empty. It was something after all to be free, even though not precisely knowing how he was to keep body and soul together. With the exception of old Mr. Marriott there seemed few to whom he could apply for advice. His late master at Winchester was away in Switzerland; the Professor and Frau Rosenwald were in Dresden and were little likely to be able to help him, while of friends of his own age he had scarcely any, owing to Lady Mactavish's dislike to his accepting invitations for the holidays which would have made return invitations necessary.

On reaching Charing Cross he went straight to Sir Matthew's house in Queen Anne's Gate, left his luggage there, arranged to come the next day and pack the few things he had in his room, and then walked to Ebury Street to inquire whether Mr. Marriott were at home. London had such a deserted air that he began to fear that the solicitor would have joined in the general exodus. But fortune favoured him, Mr. Marriott was in town still and had just returned from the City. He was ushered into a comfortable library, where, in a few moments, the old lawyer joined him, receiving him in such a kindly and courteous way that the friendless feeling which had taken possession of him on his arrival in London quite left him.

"I hope you will excuse my coming at such an hour

and to your private house, but I half feared you might be away and I was very anxious for your advice," he said, when the old man's greetings were ended.

"I'm heartily glad you did come to-night," said Mr. Marriott. "For to-morrow I go to Switzerland with my sister and my daughter. Is Sir Matthew still in town? Are you staying with him?"

"He has this very day turned me out of his house," said Ralph, and he briefly told the lawyer what had passed.

"This seems a serious matter," said Mr. Marriott. "We must talk it over together, but in the meantime, I will send round for your things, and you will, I hope, spend the night here. After dinner, we will put our heads together, and see what can be done."

Ralph could only gratefully accept the hospitality, and it proved to be just the genuine old-fashioned hospitality that does the heart good, and is as unlike its forced counterfeit as real fruit is unlike its waxen imitation.

Old Mr. Marriott's sister proved to be one of those eternally young people who at seventy have more capacity for enjoying life than many girls of eighteen. Her vivacious face, with its ever varying expression, her kindly human interest in all things and all people, did more to drive bitter recollections from Ralph's mind than anything else could have done. Moreover, he lost his heart to pretty Katharine Marriott, though she was many years his senior. Her large, serious, brown eyes,

and her air of gentle dignity seemed to him perfection; he could have imagined her to be some stately Spanish lady in her black lace dress, and though she said little to him, her whole manner was full of sympathetic charm. When the ladies had left the table, Mr. Marriott began to make further inquiries as to what had passed that afternoon.

"Is it not possible," he suggested, "that you too readily took Sir Matthew at his word? He has been kind to you all these years, has he not?"

"He has carried out what he undertook," said Ralph, "and twice, no—three times—I remember that he really spoke kindly to me. For the rest of the six years he has never noticed me at all except to find fault."

"Do you mean that you got into trouble? That your school reports were bad or anything of that sort?"

"No, they were decent enough, and I was never exactly in any scrape, but somehow, in little ways I always managed to displease him; spoke too much, or too little, or too loud, or not distinctly. If one made the least noise in coming into a room or closing a door he couldn't endure it, or if one stole in with elaborate care and quietness, he would start and say a stealthy step was intolerable to him. As to breakfast, the only meal we ever had with him as children, it used to be a time of torture, for if you held your knife or fork in a way which did not exactly meet his ideal way of holding a knife and fork, he made you feel that you had committed a crime."

"So there was never much love lost between you," said Mr. Marriott, with a smile. "Well it is what I feared would happen when I last saw you. Did he often mention your father's name?"

"Hardly ever, except when some guest was there who was likely to be impressed with his kindness in having adopted a poor clergyman's son," said Ralph, flushing hotly at certain galling recollections. "It was never until this afternoon, though, that he dared to speak of my father as an unpractical fool who had left me a beggar, and to taunt me with the high ideals which would never have kept me from starving."

"And did this lead to your quarrel?" said the lawyer, his brows contracting a little.

"Yes," said Ralph, "I replied that my father was at least an honest man, and he seemed to take that as a sort of personal affront—I'm sure I don't know why. He went into a towering rage and ordered me out of his sight."

"He is morbidly sensitive as to his reputation," said Mr. Marriott, "and no doubt he thought you knew something to his disadvantage. Did it ever occur to you as strange that he should have adopted you?"

"At first I thought it was because he had really cared for my father and because he was my godfather, but before long I began to think it was chiefly as a sort of telling advertisement," said Ralph, with a touch of bitterness in his tone.

"All three notions were probably right," said the

lawyer, "but there was yet another reason of which I can tell you something. On the day we reached Whinhaven and began to look through your father's papers, one of the very first things I came across in his blotting-book was the rough draft of a letter with a blank for the name in the first line. Seeing that it bore reference to the unlucky investment he had made, I glanced through it. It bitterly reproached the man he was writing to, for having recommended him to place his money in the company which had just gone into liquidation, and alluded to assurances that had been given him of this friend's close knowledge of all the details, and complete confidence in the safety of the company. I recollect that one sentence referred to you, and your father said, 'Should this illness of mine prove fatal, I look to you, as Ralph's godfather, to do what you can for him, for it was in consequence of your advice that I made this unfortunate speculation.'"

Ralph started to his feet. "It was Sir Matthew then who ruined him!"

"Well," said the lawyer, "on reading that I looked up and casually asked him if he knew who your godfathers were, he replied that he was one, and that to the best of his recollection, the other had been a distant kinsman of your father's, a certain Sir Richard Denmead, who had died a few years before. Then, without further comment, I handed him the letter, remarking that of course, I had no idea on reading it that it bore reference to himself. He was naturally annoyed and upset, but

was obliged to own that it was the draft of the letter he had received. He was doing what he could to justify himself when you came into the room, and what passed after that you no doubt remember."

"I remember," said Ralph, "that he patronised me—he—my father's murderer. The word is not a bit too strong for him. He murdered my father just as truly as if he had stabbed him to the heart. It was not the cold that killed him, it was the misery and the depression and the anxiety for the future. And this false friend of his is the man that goes about opening bazaars, and posing as a profoundly religious man! Faugh! It's revolting!"

"I have never liked Sir Matthew Mactavish," said Mr. Marriott, quietly. "It is wonderful to me how he impresses people; there must be some germ of greatness in him or he couldn't do it. I am quite aware that the discovery of the truth must make you feel very bitterly towards him, but if you will take an old man's advice you will dwell upon the past as little as possible. You can do no good by thinking of the injury he has done you, and you will have to be very careful how you speak of him, or in an angry moment you may make yourself liable to an action for slander; legally you know a thing may be perfectly true, but if maliciously uttered and in a way that injures another in his calling it may be nevertheless slander. So you must not proclaim your wrongs from the housetops. Now the question is what are you to do to support yourself?"

"I want to try my luck on the stage," said Ralph. "It was my wish long ago, and I believe that I might make something of it. I shall never be much good at examinations."

"It seems rather the fashion for young fellows to try it nowadays," said the lawyer, "but I should think the life was a very hard one, and like all other callings in this country it is much overcrowded. Still you might do worse. I will give you a letter to Barry Sterne; he is a client of mine and might possibly be able to help you. At anyrate he would give you his advice."

Ralph caught at the suggestion, and when the next morning the Marriotts started for Switzerland they left him in excellent spirits.

"Are you quite sure you have enough to live on until you get work," asked the old lawyer, drawing him aside at the last moment. "I will gladly lend you something."

"Thank you," replied Ralph. "But I have enough to live on till the end of September."

"And by that time we shall be in London again," said Mr. Marriott. "Be sure you come to see us and let us know how you prosper."

It was not without some trepidation that later in the morning Ralph presented himself at the house of Barry Sterne, the great actor. He sent in Mr. Marriott's letter of introduction and waited nervously in a small back sitting-room, the window of which opened into one of those miniature ferneries which one associates with the

operating room of a dentist. Three dejected gold-fish swam aimlessly up and down the narrow tank, and the ferns looked as if they pined for country air. It was a relief when at length he was summoned into the adjoining room. Here the sun was shining, and there was a general sense of ease and comfort, Barry Sterne himself harmonising very well with his setting, for he was a good-natured looking giant with a most genial manner, and his broad, expansive face beamed in a very kindly fashion on his visitor.

"I'm afraid I can't do anything for you," he said, but the words carried no sting because the tone was so delightful. "I have hundreds of these applications, and it's about the most disagreeable part of my life to be for ever saying 'no' to people."

He put a few questions to him, all the while observing him attentively with his keen eyes.

"Well, you see," he remarked, leaning back easily in his chair and telling off the various items on his fingers as he proceeded. "Things seem to me to stand like this. You have a good presence, a good voice, a good manner; but you have no experience, you have had no special preparation, you have no money, and you have no friends or relatives in the profession. There are three points for you and four against you. That means that you will have a very hard struggle, and will have to be content to take any mortal thing you can get. Are you prepared for that?"

"I am prepared to begin at the very bottom of the

profession if only it will give me a real chance of getting on," said Ralph.

"To make a fool of yourself in a pantomime, for instance," said the actor, eyeing him keenly. "Or to walk on and say nothing in a piece that runs for a couple of hundred nights?"

"Yes, I would do it," said Ralph, thoughtfully. "If, in the meantime, I was really learning and making some way."

"Right," said Barry Sterne. "That's the way to set to work. But as a rule a gentleman thinks he must step into the first ranks of the profession straight away, which is a confounded mistake. I'll write you a note of introduction to Costa, the agent. You may thoroughly trust him, and he may perhaps be able sooner or later to put you in the way of something. I wish I knew of any opening for you. But I'm off to America next month with Miss Greville's Company."

The name instantly recalled Macneillie to Ralph's mind.

"When I was a small boy," he said, "Mr. Macneillie was once very good to me. If he were in London still, I might have gone to him. Do you know what has become of him?"

"Hugh Macneillie? Why he would be precisely the man for you. He went to America about six years ago, had a tremendous success over there, and when he came back to England started a travelling company of his own. Oh, Macneillie is a sterling fellow; you couldn't

do better than try to get in with him. Costa will be able to tell you his whereabouts."

After that, with a few kindly words and good wishes, Ralph found himself dismissed.

The day was intensely hot; however, he set off at once for the agent's, handed in Barry Sterne's letter, was sharply scrutinised by Costa's keen Jewish eyes, and had his name entered upon the books, after paying five shillings.

"You must not be too sanguine," said the agent, his dark melancholy face contrasting oddly with Ralph's fresh colouring, and hopeful eyes. "I have one thousand, nine hundred and ninety nine names down of members of the profession who are out of employment, or of people who seek to enter the profession. You bring up the total to two thousand."

Ralph turned a little pale. "Is it so bad as that," he said, "Then I have no chance at all, it seems to me."

He asked for Macneillie's present address and went off in very low spirits to write his letter, pack up his worldly goods, and take up his quarters in the rooms which Geraghty had recommended.

People seldom do things well when they are in low spirits, and Ralph, who detested giving trouble or asking favours, wrote a stiff, short letter to Macneillie, asking his advice and inquiring whether he could possibly give him a place in his company. It was precisely the sort of letter which Macneillie received by the dozen

from stage-struck youths in all parts of the country. Had he spoken of his boyish hero-worship of the actor, or of their encounter at Richmond, there would have been a human touch about the letter which would at once have appealed to the Scotsman; he would certainly have made a special effort for one so closely connected with the most tragic day of his life. But Ralph after floundering hopelessly in a sentence which alluded to the past, tore up his sheet of paper and wrote the bald, curt note, which so ill conveyed the real state of his case.

Macneillie, wearily returning from a rehearsal of four hours' length, in which his temper had been severely tried, found the missive in his dreary lodgings at a south-coast watering-place, hastily-glanced through the contents and thrust the letter into his letter-clip among other similar requests, about which there was no immediate hurry. A fortnight later he wrote the following short reply:

“DEAR SIR,

“I have no opening at present in my company, and if you really intend to go into the profession, and have realised that it demands incessant and most arduous work, I should strongly advise you to begin at the beginning of all things. Try to get taken on as a super at one of the leading theatres, where you will have oppor-

tunities for studying really great actors. Costa is a trustworthy agent.

“Yours truly,

“HUGH MACNEILLIE.”

The letter chanced to arrive in Paradise Street on a foggy September evening when Ralph was in particularly low spirits. He had expected much from Macneillie and was proportionately disappointed. It seemed almost as if an old friend had shut the door in his face, nor did he quite realise that few men as busy, and as much tormented by importunate scribblers as Macneillie, would have troubled to answer his appeal at all. What was he to do? Where was he to turn for work? And how much longer would Evereld's money hold out? The question was more easily than satisfactorily answered. It was clearly impossible that he could exist much longer in Paradise Street, and though its dingy room and bare, scanty furniture was far from inviting, yet he had grown fond of his good-natured landlord and took a kindly interest in the whole family of Doolans, with their easy, happy-go-lucky ways, and strong sense of humour. Life was lonely enough now. What would it be if he were altogether without a home in this great wilderness of London?

CHAPTER VIII.

“A man who habitually pleases himself will become continually more selfish and sordid, even among the most noble and beautiful conditions which nature, history, or art can furnish; and, on the other hand, anyone who will try each day to live for the sake of others, will grow more and more gracious in thought and bearing, however dull and even squalid may be the outward circumstances of his soul’s probation.”—DEAN PAGET.

RALPH’S chief comfort at this time was in a certain free library at no great distance from his lodgings. He made his way there now, and for a time lost the sense of his troubles in the world of books. This evening he had the good fortune to light upon Stanley Weyman’s “House of the Wolf,” a story which gave him keener and more healthy enjoyment than he had known for many a day. When he came back to the everyday world again and set out for his return walk to Paradise Street, he found that the fog had very much increased and it was with great difficulty that he could make out his way. As he was groping cautiously along an almost deserted street, he was startled by the sound of a shrill, childish voice.

“Let me go! Let me go!” it cried passionately. “How dare you stop me? How dare you?”

Ralph ran in the direction of the sound, until in the fog and darkness, he cannoned against the form of a

man who turned angrily upon him, revealing as he did so, in the dim lamplight which struggled through the murky air, the evil face of an old *roué*. Fighting to free herself from him, like a little wild-cat, was the figure of a mere child; her vigour and agility were wonderful to behold and it was a task of no great difficulty for Ralph to help in freeing her from the clutches of the two-legged brute. Spite of the imperfect light, the child had been quick-witted enough to recognise the new-comer as a protector, and she clung firmly to his hand as they went down the foggy street, never pausing until all fear of further molestation was over. Then, panting for breath, she stopped for a minute beneath a lamp-post, and in the little oasis of light, looked searchingly up into his face as though to make quite sure what manner of man he was. He saw now that she must be older than he had thought; from her height he had fancied her about eleven but he realised both by her face and her expression, that she must be at least fifteen. Her colouring was curiously like Evereld's, but the face was sharper, and had a funny look of assurance and knowledge of the world, which was, nevertheless, belied by the childish curves of cheek and chin, and by the nervous pressure with which she still clasped his hand.

"I don't know a bit what this street is," she said, with tears in her voice, "and if I don't soon get home grandfather will be dreadfully anxious about me."

"Where is your home?" asked Ralph, feeling curi-

ously drawn to the forlorn little mortal who had crossed his path so strangely.

"It's in Paradise Street, Vauxhall," said the child.

"Ah, that's lucky!" said Ralph. "My rooms are there too. What takes you out at this time of night? It's not safe for you to be wandering about London alone."

"I always do go alone," said the child, a little indignantly. "And no one ever dared to bother me before. One of the dressers always walks with me as far as our roads lie together, but this bit I always do alone ever since I went to the theatre."

"Oh, you are on the stage," said Ralph, his interest increasing. "Well, you are lucky to have work; it's more than I can get."

"I used only to dance," said the child, eagerly. "But now I have a little part of my own, but of course you won't know my name yet, it's not much known. I am Miss Ivy Grant."

There was a comical touch of pride and dignity in the words. Ralph's lip twitched, but he bowed gravely and said he was delighted to make her acquaintance. Then, having walked a little further, they suddenly realised what road they were in and without much more difficulty groped their way home to Paradise Street.

"I want you to come in and see my grandfather," said Ivy, pausing at her door. "He will be very grateful to you for having helped me."

Ralph hesitated. "It is late for me to come in now," he said.

"It won't be late for grandfather, he never settles in till after midnight. He is half paralysed. Please come."

He couldn't find it in his heart to resist the pleading little voice, and Ivy took him through the narrow passage and into the front sitting-room, where they found a fine-looking old man whose flowing, white beard and many-coloured dressing-gown gave him a sort of Eastern look. The small, grey, critical eyes, however, were not Eastern at all and when he spoke Ralph fancied that he could detect a slight Scotch accent, which together with the tone of voice made him think somehow of Sir Matthew Mactavish.

He looked searchingly at the new-comer, but on Ivy's hurried explanation held out his hand cordially, thanking him for coming to the child's aid with a warmth which was evidently genuine.

"She has to be breadwinner-in-chief to the establishment," he said, with a smile, "and being a wise-like little body seldom gets into difficulties. Being a useless old log myself I should long ago have been hewn down and cast into the Union had it not been for the Ivy that supported me."

"You say those pretty things because you know it will make me come and kiss you," said Ivy, saucily, as she threw off her cloak and hat and wreathed her arms about the old man's neck. "And now while I get your coffee

ready you must talk to Mr. Denmead, for he wants work at the theatre and can't get it."

"Half a dozen years ago when I was dramatic critic for the *Pennon* I might have done something for you," said the old man, wistfully. "But now I am little but a burden, as I told you. A few pupils come to me still for lessons in elocution, and I have the training of Ivy, who is going to be a credit to me."

As he spoke he glanced towards the little housewife who with an air of importance was preparing the supper; Ralph thought he had never before seen anyone move with such grace, and though her face was lacking in the simplicity and peace which characterised Evereld, it was a particularly winsome little face.

"How did you get on to-night, little one?" said the old man.

"Very well," said Ivy as she poured the coffee out of an ancient percolator into three earthenware cups which had seen hard service. Ralph observed that she kept the cup without a handle for herself, and carefully selected him one which was without a chip on the drinking side of the rim. "But I might easily have broken my leg," she continued, cheerfully; "for that stupid Jem had forgotten to shut one of the traps properly, and Mr. Merrithorne stumbled and hurt his ankle badly."

"What part does he play?" said her grandfather.

"Oh he hasn't very much to do, he is a rather stupid footman and he was bringing in the luncheon tray with

the property pie and that old fowl which wants painting again so badly, and when he tripped up, the pie went bowling down the stage, and the fowl landed in Miss West's lap and everyone roared with laughter. She was dreadfully angry, but afterwards when it seemed that Mr. Merrithorne was really hurt she was rather sorry for him."

"Who is his understudy?"

"I don't know. It is such a little part, perhaps he hasn't one. But he was limping dreadfully as he went away. I shouldn't think he could act to-morrow."

"It's possible that might give you a chance," said the professor of elocution. "A stupid, countrified manservant you say, Ivy? Are you pretty good at dialect?"

Ralph laughed, for he knew that he was an adept at a certain south country dialect, and without more ado stood up and gave the Professor a short and highly humorous dialogue between a ploughman and his boy, with which he had often made Evereld and her governess laugh."

"Good," said the Professor, his grey eyes twinkling, "I think you'll do, young man; but come to me to-morrow morning at nine o'clock and I'll give you a few hints about voice production."

Ralph coloured. "You are very good," he said, "but to tell the truth I am at my wit's end for money and much as I would like lessons can't possibly afford them."

"Pshaw! nonsense," said the Professor, knitting his

brows. "I'm already in your debt, for it might have fared ill with the child had you not taken care of her to-night. If I can give you a helping hand, nothing would please me better. And after the lesson you might go round with Ivy, and I'll give you an introduction to the manager. He's a man I knew well at one time."

Ralph's face lighted up. "I should be very grateful," he said, eagerly, "for this waiting about for work is tedious enough, and I shall be starved out before long."

He went home much cheered and with great expectations. The Professor interested him; there was something half mysterious about the white-haired old man which puzzled him and piqued his curiosity. He was particularly benevolent and kindly and yet he seemed as unpractical as a mere visionary, and was surely to blame in letting a child like Ivy go to and from the theatre each night alone.

Clearly the granddaughter was manager-in-chief as well as breadwinner, and as he thought of her winsome little face with its shrewd, light-blue eyes, slightly *retroussé* nose, and small, firm mouth he felt a keen desire to see more of her. She was so quaint in her brisk, housewifely arrangements, so deft and clever in all her ways; a little conscious at times, and quite capable of posing for effect, but lovable in spite of that.

"I could soon laugh her out of those little affectations," he thought to himself. "And there is such a look of Evereld about her that she must at heart be

good. She is very clever, possibly she is even cunning, and she has extraordinary tact—almost too much for such a child.”

He went to sleep and was haunted all night by that funny, pathetic little face of the child actress. Together they fled from a thousand perils, and when next morning he saw her again face to face, it seemed to him that they were quite old companions.

“Good-day,” said the Professor in his bland, pleasant voice as Ralph was ushered into the dreary little room. “Sit down for a minute, I have not yet finished with my other pupil. Now sir! don’t mumble like a bee in a bottle. You know well enough how to get the clear shock of the glottis, and that’s the secret of voice production. You have the voice and the lungs and the knowledge of the method, but you are lazy, incorrigibly lazy!”

The young man crimsoned and with an effort burst out with one of Prospero’s speeches:

“I pray thee, mark me.
I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
To closeness and the bettering of my mind
With that which, but by being so retired,
O’erprized all popular rate, in my false brother
Awaked an evil nature.”

There he was arrested; for the Professor thundered on the floor with his walking stick, looking as if he would much have enjoyed laying it about the victim’s shoulders.

His scathing sarcasms, his merciless interruptions, his sharp criticism, would have tried the patience of Job himself, but his unfortunate pupil struggled on and really improved marvellously, while Ralph sat an observant spectator, learning not a little from all that went on. At the close of the instruction the old man's serenity of manner returned—he even praised the youth he had so violently abused but a minute before. The reason of this soon transpired; he needed his help with the next pupil. “You are not pressed for time?” he asked, with a smile. “Then I shall be much obliged if you will kindly help my new pupil, Mr. Denmead, with the first exercise.”

The victim glanced somewhat anxiously at the clock, but the Professor was evidently an autocrat, and it would have been easier to refuse a request made by the Czar himself.

“You will lie at full length on the floor,” said the Professor, with a lordly wave of the hand towards Ralph. “My pupil, Mr. Bourne, will then kneel on your chest, and you will in this position practise the art of breathing.”

Ralph obeyed, not without a strong sense of the absurdity of the whole scene. Could Sir Matthew Mac-tavish have seen him at that moment, lying on the bare boards of a dingy lodging-house in Vauxhall, with a young reciter of no mean weight kneeling on his chest, with a paralytic and mysterious old sage roaring and shouting instructions and beating impatient tattoos with

his stick at intervals, while a pretty young girl sat by the window covering stage shoes with cheap pink satin, how amazed he would have been.

This was certainly beginning at the beginning of all things. By eleven o'clock that morning he was for the first time in his life entering the stage door of a theatre,—it was one of the outlying suburban houses at which there was a stock company and a frequent change of plays,—while Ivy, with her funny little air of importance, showed him all that she thought would interest him.

The manager, a somewhat harassed-looking man, took the Professor's note, read it hurriedly, and glanced keenly at Ralph.

"Does Mr. Merrithorne act to-night?" asked Ivy, anxiously.

"No, my dear; he won't be fit to go on again for a month at least. I understand, Mr. Denmead, that you are a pupil of Professor Grant."

"Yes," said Ralph, "but I am quite a novice."

"H'm," said the manager, taking a long look at him. "You're positively the first man that ever made that confession to me. I've a mind to try you. Come with me, and I will give you the part. You can read it at rehearsal if you haven't time to learn it."

Ivy beamed with delight when he returned to her.

"The manager was just in his very best temper," she said, happily. "Come to this quiet corner, and I'll see that no one interrupts you."

The part was short and simple, and Ralph, who had an excellent memory, learnt it easily enough. But when it came to rehearsing his scenes in the dreary vastness of the empty theatre amid distant sounds of hammering and scrubbing, and the perfectly audible comments of his fellow actors, he felt in despair; there was no getting inside the character, he could only feel himself Ralph Denmead, in uncomfortable circumstances, and breathing a curious atmosphere of hostility. He went home feeling nervous and miserable, but Ivy's talk helped to amuse him, and distract his attention.

"They will like you when they get used to you," she said, philosophically. "But some of them think you are just a wealthy amateur, and that you have paid for the chance of appearing in public. We all hate that kind of man. Some others say you are an Oxonian wanting a little amusement during the long vacation, and that you will be going back to the University next month. And Miss West thinks you are a disguised nobleman."

"Well, then, they're all of them wrong," said Ralph, obliged to laugh in spite of himself. "I'm not a disguised duke, nor even a marquis, but just plain Ralph Denmead, with very few coins in his pocket, and not a single relation or rich friend to help him."

When the evening came, Ralph found that the flatness and coldness of the morning had entirely passed;

everyone seemed in better spirits, and the two men who shared his dressing-room were friendly enough directly they found he was a genuine worker, not a mere *dilet-tante*.

A youngster who was neither conceited nor grasping, but was content to begin with a very small part, and a still smaller salary, was quite a phenomenon, and, as usual, Ralph's good humour and common-sense, together with his readiness to see fun in everything, stood him in good stead.

When the last awful moment arrived, and he stood at the wings in his gorgeous livery of drab and scarlet, with powdered hair and knee-breeches, he found that the atmosphere of hostility which he had felt so oppressive at rehearsal was entirely gone.

"Good luck to you!" said the heavy man, laying a fatherly hand on his shoulder. "Never fear; you'll do well enough."

And with these words to hearten him, he took that first desperate plunge into the icy-cold waters of publicity.

Ivy's face beamed upon him as he returned.

"That applause was for you," she said, rapturously, "and they don't generally laugh nearly as much after that blunder with the luncheon table."

"But I see where I might improve it," said Ralph, thoughtfully. And truly enough he did improve each night he played the servant and other small parts.

Then, at the end of a month, Merrithorne's ankle recovered, he returned to the theatre, and Ralph once more found himself out of work.

What was his next step to be?"

CHAPTER IX.

“If I were loved, as I desire to be,
What is there in the great sphere of the earth,
And range of evil between death and birth,
That I shall fear, if I were loved by thee?”

TENNYSON.

“If yer plase, yer honour, Mr. Geraghty is below, and would like to see yer honour if its convaniant,” said little Nora Doolan, thrusting her untidy head into the cheerless back room in Paradise Street.

Ralph, who was pacing to and fro learning a part in a Shakesperian play which he was little likely to act as yet, glanced round with brightening face.

“What? Dear old Geraghty!” he exclaimed. “I’m glad he has looked me up. Show him upstairs, Nora, for I should like to have a talk with him.”

The old man-servant responded with alacrity to the warm welcome he received.

“It’s delighted I am to see you again, Mr. Ralph,” he exclaimed, looking him over with an air of satisfaction as though he had some share in his well-being. “And it’s in good health that you are looking, sir, and no mistake.”

“Nothing like hard work, Geraghty, for keeping a man well,” said Ralph. “And I hope I’m settled now

for some time to come. You can tell Miss Evereld that I'm at the very theatre we so often used to go to, and that I have the pleasure of seeing Washington act every night."

"I'm glad to hear it, sir," said Geraghty. "We all knew long ago, sir, that you'd make a first-class actor; it took but a little small bit of discrimination to see that much."

Ralph laughed. "Well, Geraghty, you mustn't run away with the notion that I'm a star, for, as a matter of fact, I am nothing but a super at a pound a week. But it's better to begin at the beginning in a good theatre than to be cock-of-the-walk in a fifth-rate one."

"To be sure, sir, it's just what I was saying but now to my sister about placing her eldest girl. 'Never mind how little she earns the first year or two,' said I, 'but for heaven's sake place her in a gentleman's family, and don't let her demean herself by takin' service with them that hasn't an ounce of breeding to bless themselves with. Let her be kitchen or scullery-maid or what you will, but have her with gentry.'"

"Geraghty," said Ralph, with a mischievous smile, "you have such a respect for birth that it's my firm conviction you'll be the last and most staunch supporter left to the House of Lords."

Geraghty laughed all over his face, and his broad shoulders shook.

"I've seen just a little too much of the aristocracy

to pin my faith to them, sir. Handsome is as handsome does, and gentle is as gentle does. But from the House of Lords and their marrin' and muddlin'—Good Lord deliver us!”

Ralph who had purposely provoked this tirade from the Irishman, laughed and changed the subject by an inquiry after Evereld.

“Well, thank God, she’s getting on finely, sir. Seems as if there was a special Providence over orphans, and Bridget she says why that’s natural enough, that their parents can see better how to guide them bein’ higher up so to speak. But, however that may be, at first we all thought she’d fret her heart out with missin’ you, sir. But in September, Bridget took her down to the school at Southbourne, and though she was a bit faint-hearted at the notion, she’d no sooner set eyes on the place than she was sure she’d be happy there. Bridget says it’s the most beautiful house and garden you ever saw, and all so comfortable and homelike in spite of the size. And Miss Evereld writes that she’s as happy as the day is long, and that they’re teaching her how to nurse sick folks, and that she’s learnt to darn her own stockin’s—a thing she never got a chance o’ doin’ at home—and to dance the minuet, and to do algebra, and I don’t know what beside. But, from what Bridget told me, I foregathered that it wasn’t a school where they cram them like turkeys for Christmas or geese for a Michaelmas fair, but just a home on a large scale for turnin’ out well-mannered young gentlewomen who’ll have a

very good notion how to manage a home on a smaller scale."

When the old Butler had gone, Ralph fell into a reverie. The effect of hearing all about Evereld had been to make him long very impatiently for the end of their separation. It was true that when she returned to the Mactavishes at Christmas he could write to her without any breach of regulations, but there seemed no chance of their meeting, and he greatly missed his old companion. He began to weave all manner of visions of future success, and to imagine that in an incredibly short space of time he had gained quite a high position at Washington's theatre, that he met Evereld in society, and that Sir Matthew, who always paid homage to the successful, became quite friendly and cordial to him. How strange it would be to be invited as a distinguished guest to the very house in Queen Anne's Gate where he had been snubbed and scolded as a boy.

It was with something of a shock that he came back to the prosaic present and found himself merely a super about to go through, for the fiftieth time, the wearisome business which was his allotted share in a play which was likely to run for many months more.

It was just at Christmas that he was confronted by one of those decisions that form the chief difficulty of an actor's career. To seize the right opportunity of promotion, yet to avoid "Raw haste, half-sister to delay"; to have precisely that right judgment which often determines the success or failure of a life, is hard to all mor-

tals, but hardest to those of the artistic temperament. The temptation to escape from the monotony of his present work came to him through the Professor's granddaughter.

To little Ivy Grant he had from the very first seemed a full-fledged hero. He was the first man she had ever looked up to, for although devoted to her old grandfather it was not easy to respect the Professor. He seemed, to shrewd little Ivy, a very weak old man, and she despised the weak, not understanding at all that habit of making large allowance for human infirmity which grows with the growing years. The old man was a confirmed opium eater. The habit, begun in a time of physical pain and great mental worry, had now bound him fast in its cruel chains, and the kindly benevolence which had struck Ralph at first sight as so strange a contrast with his blameworthy neglect of Ivy's safety, was all due to the influence of the drug. His will was now not in the least his own, and though he had his moments of exquisite exaltation he had always to pay for them by times of black depression and misery. Under these circumstances the child's life could hardly be a happy one; she was, moreover, scarcely strong enough for the late hours and the exposure to all sorts of weather which her work entailed, and in spite of her brisk, managing ways she began to crave for something more strong and trustworthy to support her than her grandfather whose simile of the lifeless trunk of the tree kept up by the ivy supporting it, had been singularly near the truth.

When Ralph no longer played at the same theatre, and their meetings became less frequent, the little girl flagged and lost heart. She had good impulses but she was easily led, and her friendship with Ralph had filled her with a sense of dissatisfaction with her own life, and the lives that most nearly touched her own. Her busy little brain began to form eager plans for the future, and at last fate put in her way a chance which revived her drooping spirits, and lighted up her blue eyes with hope. Her good news arrived on Christmas day, otherwise the festival would have been cheerless enough, for the old Professor had slept in his invalid chair the whole of the morning, and Ivy, sitting in solitary state beside the fire, had eaten a sober little Christmas dinner consisting of a slice of cold meat and a mince-pie kindly given to her by the landlady. Then having tidied the bare little room, and stuck a solitary piece of holly in the window that people might see she was "keeping Christmas" properly, she turned to her place on the hearth-rug, and tried to become interested in a penny novelette which should have been exciting, but somehow failed to touch her.

"Stupid thing!" she exclaimed presently, throwing the book to the further end of the room with a little petulant gesture. "I can't even cry when the heroine dies. What is the good of a book if you can't cry over it?"

Just then there came a tap at the door, and in walked

Ralph with his cheerful face, and in his hands was a great bunch of ivy and mistletoe.

"A happy Cristmas to you," he said, taking her cold little hand in his. "How's the Professor? Not worse, I hope?"

"He is no worse," said Ivy, "but he has been asleep all day, and it's dreadfully dull. Where did you get such lovely evergreens?"

"Walked out into the country this morning, right away beyond Hampstead. As for the mistletoe, that's a particular present from Dan Doolan, and I've just had to kiss seven small Doolans beneath it before they would let me out of the house. Now your turn has come."

Ivy laughed and protested, but was thrilled through and through by the kiss, though it was just as matter-of-fact as that which he had bestowed on Tim Doolan, aged three. Her little, pale face lighted up radiantly, but unobservant Ralph saw nothing of that, he was bestowing all his energies on the decoration of the dreary little room, and crowning with ivy the portraits of sundry great actors and actresses.

"Do you think Mrs. Siddons ever looked as stiff and forbidding as this?" he said, glancing round with a smile, as Ivy held him a laurel branch to put above the frame.

"Yes," she replied, saucily. "She must have looked like that when she said in awful tones, 'Will it wash?'"

to the poor frightened shopman who was serving her."

"Ah, perhaps. Well, Ivy, there is no fear that you will ever strike terror into anyone's heart."

"Who cares for striking terror into people?" she replied, merrily, and as she spoke she began to float dreamily away into an exquisitely graceful skirt-dance; her little, childish face growing more and more sweet and tranquil as she proceeded.

Clearly dancing was her vocation. Ralph stood with his back to the fire watching her perfect grace: it seemed to him the very poetry of motion. And Ivy was at her very best when she was dancing; at other times her ways occasionally jarred on him, her acting left much to be desired, and a certain vein of silliness in her now and then awoke his contempt, but when dancing she seemed like one inspired; he could only wonder and admire.

"Some day you will be our greatest English dancer," he said, as once more she settled down into her nook beside the fire.

"I don't want to be that," said Ivy, "English dancers are never made so much of as foreigners, and besides, a dancer's position is not so good. I mean to be an actress."

"It's a thousand pities," said Ralph. "Why do people always want to do things they can't do well."

Ivy pouted.

"Grandfather doesn't wish me only to dance," she

said. "And besides I have just heard of quite a fresh opening. What would you say to earning two pounds a week?"

"I should say I'm not likely to do that yet awhile," said Ralph, philosophically.

"But you can! you can!" said Ivy, clapping her hands joyfully. "There's an opening for you as well as for me, for I specially asked. It's a 'fit up' company and we should be wanted in February when the pantomime is over."

"Where?" asked Ralph, looking incredulous.

"For a tour in Scotland. A 'fit up' company too, and nothing to provide but just wigs and shoes and tights."

"Who is the manager?"

"The husband of the leading lady. His name is Skoot."

"Don't like the name," said Ralph, laughing.

"Why what's in a name?" said Ivy. "The poor man didn't choose it. For my part I think it is better than assuming some grand name that doesn't belong to him. And then his Christian name is Theophilus."

But Ralph still laughed.

"Worse and worse," he said. "Theophilus Skoot is a detestable combination. Dick, Tom, or Harry, would have been better. No, no, Ivy; I think we had better stay where we are."

Ivy looked much disheartened, and to change the subject Ralph suggested that they should go together to

the Abbey. This pleased her, she forgot the Scotch tour and only revelled in the bliss of the present. To walk to church on Christmas day with her ideal man, to feel the subtle influence of the beautiful Abbey, the lights, the music, the religious atmosphere, seemed to her a sort of foretaste of heaven, a slightly sensuous heaven perhaps, but the highest she was as yet capable of imagining. Ralph was not sorry to have the child with him, for his Christmas had been lonely enough. But his thoughts wandered far away from her during the service. He was back again at Whinhaven listening to his father's voice, or he was with Evereld and her governess listening to solemn old chorales at Dresden.

Presently a very slight thing recalled him to his actual surroundings. The sermon was about to begin and someone sitting in front of him rose to go just as the text was given out:

“And in the fulness of time God sent——”

He heard no more, for the vacant place had revealed to him, at a little distance in front, a profile which arrested his whole attention. Something in its earnest, absorbed expression, in its exquisite purity, in the listening look of one who is eager to learn, appealed to him strongly. Then suddenly his heart gave a bound, for it was borne in upon him that he was looking at Evereld. Not the Evereld he had left on that summer day as a playmate and comrade, but a new Evereld who had developed into a woman—the one woman in all the world for him. He did not wish the sermon ended, he

could have been almost content to sit on there for ever just watching her; that curious description of heaven as a place

“Where congregations ne’er break up,
And Sabbaths never end,”—

a notion which has cast a gloom over so many children’s hearts, seemed to him in his present mood after all not so impossible.

When the service was really over, and the people began to disperse, he was in a fever lest he should be unable to reach her, and it was not until he had discovered that Bridget was her companion that he could feel at all secure of any real talk with her.

Ivy, quite unconscious of all this, wondered a little when he paused in the nave; but she did not at all object to standing there with him, looking into the dim beauty of the stately building, and with a proud little consciousness that many people glanced at them as they passed by. It was so nice, she reflected, to go to church with a man like Ralph, a man wholly unlike any other she had yet come across in her short and rather dreary life.

Meanwhile, Evereld was drawing nearer. Ivy was just admiring her dark-green jacket and toque with their beaver trimmings, and longing to have just such a costume herself, when she saw a vivid colour suffuse the wearer’s face, her blue eyes shone radiantly, her lips smiled such a welcoming smile at Ralph that no words, no hand-clasp, seemed necessary. Side by side they

passed together out of the Abbey, while Ivy, in blank surprise, followed in their wake.

"To think that you were there all the time and that I never knew it," said Evereld, when the greetings were over. "Where is Bridget? How surprised she will be. Look, Bridget, here is Mr. Ralph come back."

"An' it's glad I am to see you, sir. There'll be no need, I'm thinkin', to wish you a happy Christmas, for I can see by your face that you've got it."

Ralph did, indeed, seem to be in the seventh heaven of happiness, but as he gave a cordial greeting to the old servant he happened to notice Ivy's wistful, little face, and, with a pang of reproach for having altogether forgotten her, he took her hand in his and introduced her to Evereld.

"This is a little friend of mine," he said. "The granddaughter of Professor Grant, my elocution master."

Evereld liked the look of the little fairylike figure, but she seemed to her the merest child, and after a few kindly words she thought no more of her, being naturally absorbed in Ralph and having so much to say to him after their long separation.

Ivy, with a sigh, dropped behind with Bridget, who, in her motherly fashion, took her under her special protection as they crossed the wide road near the Aquarium, little guessing that this small person was well used to going about London quite alone at all hours.

"And how are things going at Queen Anne's Gate?"

asked Ralph, when Evereld had told him all about her life at Southbourne.

"It's so dull I hardly know how to bear it," said Evereld. "You see, I'm too big now for children's parties, and, of course, I'm not out yet. I miss you all day long, and no one so much as speaks of you, except now and then Mr. Bruce Wylie, and he always did like you."

"Not he," said Ralph. "He made believe, though, for the sake of pleasing you."

"I see that you have not lost your way of thinking evil of people," said Evereld, reproachfully. "Mr. Wylie is the kindest man I know."

"But you don't know him," said Ralph. "You merely see him now and then and like his pleasant way of talking, and find him a relief from the Mactavish clan."

"And how much do you know him?" said Evereld, teasingly.

"Not much, certainly," he was constrained to own with a smile, "and it may be jealousy that makes me decry him. Yet, if instinct goes for anything, he is a man I should never trust."

"What! such a frank, straightforward sort of man as that?" she exclaimed, in dismay.

"I know he's very plausible, I know he has many good points even, but I fancy he could persuade himself that anything was right if only it promoted his own ends."

"At anyrate, he is the one person who ever troubles to inquire after you, and I believe that is the chief reason I have for liking him."

Ralph was so well content with this speech that he let the subject drop, and, as Evereld was eager to hear all that he had been doing since they had been separated, he began to give her an amusing account of the straits he had been in and the work he had obtained. Far too soon they reached Sir Matthew's house, and were obliged to part.

"You will write when you can?" said Evereld, wistfully, as she lingered for a moment on the steps with her hand in his. "I don't think Sir Matthew has any right to object, and I shall want to know what you decide about Scotland."

"Yes, you shall hear directly it is decided," said Ralph, trying to feel hopeful. "I wish I knew what would be the wisest thing to do."

"Then, with a lingering glance into the sweet eyes lifted to his, he bade her good-bye and turned away.

"How I wish I were the Professor's little granddaughter," she thought to herself as she glanced down the dark road after them, with a sick longing to be going too. And, had she but known it, Ivy was at that very time thinking enviously of Ralph's old friend and of her many advantages.

Meanwhile Geraghty threw open the front door, and in the cheerful light that streamed through the hall Evereld caught a vision of Sir Matthew coming down the stairs, and, taking her courage in both hands, she entered the house and went straight up to him.

CHAPTER X.

“Savage at heart, and false of tongue,
Subtle with age, and smooth to the young,
Like a snake in his coiling and curling.”

T. HOOD.

“So you have been to the Abbey?” he said, smiling benevolently upon her.

“Yes,” she replied, her blue eyes looked straight into his. “And we have seen Ralph. He was there, too, just behind us. He walked back with us.”

Sir Matthew frowned slightly. Then, recollecting the presence of the servants, he beckoned Evereld to his study.

“Come in here, my dear,” he said, in his soft voice. “You are quite right to tell me all so frankly, and it is natural enough that you should be pleased to meet your old playfellow. But you must remember that things are not now as they once were.”

“Ralph and I shall always be friends,” said Evereld, gently, but with a firmness which startled her guardian. “Things are not altered between us because we don’t live under the same roof now. How could that alter us?”

“My dear, it is for Lady Mactavish and myself to

decide who shall or who shall not be your friends," he said, with quiet decision.

"That may be," said Evereld, "as far as new friends are concerned, but I cannot unmake a friend to order—no, not even if the Queen commanded it."

They both smiled a little. Sir Matthew paced the room in silence.

"I must not forbid her to hold any communication with him," he reflected, "or let her feel that I am a tyrant and they a couple of martyrs. After all, she is so young and simple and innocent; no mischief will come of it."

"Has Ralph found work?" he inquired, not unkindly.

"Yes," she said, "at Washington's theatre; and perhaps he is going on a Scotch tour."

"Good!" said Sir Matthew, approvingly. "After all, he has talent, and will make himself a name in time. His best chance would be to marry some experienced actress older than himself. That has answered very well in one or two cases. His birth and education would go for something, and if he plays his cards well the stage may make his fortune. By-the-bye, Bruce Wylie is to dine with us to-night. You like him, do you not?"

"Oh, yes," said Evereld, "I like him very much."

And Sir Matthew, satisfied with the warmth of her tone, dismissed her with a paternal kiss, and an injunction to put on her prettiest gown in honour of the festival.

Bruce Wylie was certainly the most attractive and

amusing of the men who visited the Mactavishes. He had the easy, comfortable air of an old friend, and he came and went at all hours, yet never seemed to be present when he was not wanted. His fair hair and short, fair beard contrasted rather curiously with his dark, keen eyes. He had a brisk, kindly, pleasant manner, and a particularly winning voice. There was about him, too, a saving sense of humour, and the rather heavy atmosphere of Sir Matthew's household always seemed less oppressive when he was present. He was a first-rate *raconteur*, and Evereld was never tired of listening to his stories.

It was all in vain that she tried to see him with Ralph's eyes. She decided in her own mind that his hard experience of the world had made Ralph somewhat cynical and distrustful. He had convinced her with regard to Sir Matthew, but to belief in Bruce Wylie she still clung with all the loyalty of her fresh, innocent youth.

And yet the ladies had only left the dining-room a few moments when Bruce Wylie revealed a very different side of himself.

"Ewart's little girl is looking prettier than usual to-night," he remarked, as he picked out the preserved apricots from a small dish in front of him, leaving only bitter oranges and citrons for those who might come after.

"Yes," said Sir Matthew, "Southbourne has done

wonders for her. She had better have another six months there."

"Was she not eighteen in the autumn? She will want to come out next season."

"I don't think it," said Sir Matthew. "She is happy enough there, and we shall do well to keep her from the heiress-hunters till she is safely betrothed to you."

"Poor little soul!" said Bruce Wylie, reflectively. "There would be no danger in letting her see a little of the world first."

"We won't risk that," said his companion. "What's to prevent her falling in love with some young fellow and refusing to look at you. If she ever lost her heart, she would be the veriest little shrew to manage—there would be no taming her. We might prevent her marrying till she was of age, but you know what revelations would come about when her affairs were looked into. No, no; she must be safely married to her worthy solicitor, Bruce Wylie, as soon as possible after she leaves school."

Bruce Wylie seemed lost in thought. Sir Matthew watched him, half-suspiciously. They were friends and confederates, but the company promoter trusted no one in the world implicitly.

"You are thinking that it is a risky venture," he said, quietly, "but under the circumstances it's far the best thing that can be done. If the South African affair goes on as well as it promises, her money will be safe enough in the long run; and if a smash comes, why her

money will be gone, but our names and reputations will be safe, and no great harm will come of it."

"I was not thinking of that," said Bruce Wylie. "There's another side to the business, and one can't altogether overlook it. I am fond of the little thing, and I honestly believe she likes me, but if anything of this should ever leak out, if, after we were married, her suspicions were roused, why then, as you say, I can imagine that the taming process might be difficult. Spite of her china-blue eyes, there's a pretty spice of determination in Ewart's little girl."

"My dear fellow, you astonish me," said Sir Matthew, impatiently. "With enough on your mind to burden most men heavily, you can yet find time to worry over the matrimonial squabbles that may ruffle your future peace. When once she's your wife you'll be able to do what you please with her."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Bruce Wylie. "It's just those little, gentle women with hardly a word to say for themselves who are always astonishing people by hidden stores of force and courage and daring at some critical moment."

"The only possible difficulty with Evereld would be her friendship for Ralph Denmead," said Sir Matthew, "and, as ill luck will have it, the fellow turned up again to-day."

"D—— him!" exclaimed Bruce Wylie. "How was that?"

"Saw her at the Abbey, and had the audacity to

walk home with her. She told me all about it with the utmost frankness, and without so much as a change of colour. I don't think there is any mischief done yet, but the less she sees of him the better. It seems that he is doing pretty well on the stage; at least, I gathered so."

"Well," said Bruce Wylie, reflectively, "it is always easy to set a scandal afloat about an actor, and if she seems losing her heart to him that is the line we must take."

And therewith the two friends fell to talking of other business arrangements.

When Ralph turned away from the house in Queen Anne's Gate, the happy excitement of the past hour suddenly gave place to a sobering realisation of things as they were. He, Ralph Denmead, a super at a pound a week, had had the audacity to fall in love with a girl of whose fortune he had, indeed, very vague ideas, but who had always been considered an heiress. That was a situation he liked very little, but it was characteristic of him that he did not sink into any very great depths of depression. He was not easily depressed, having been born with one of those equable tempers which are as delightful as they are rare. Then, too, his very indifference to money for its own sake, the habit he had inherited from his unworldly father of a positive dislike of all display and a contempt for all but the simplest tastes, came now to his aid. Extremes meet.

And the marriage, which would have seemed a perfectly simple and desirable arrangement to a selfish fortune-hunter, seemed also perfectly possible to Ralph with his unconventional way of looking at things. He disliked her fortune, would gladly have foregone it altogether, but saw no reason in the world why it should stand as a barrier between them. If she loved him all would be well. He hoped she did love him, but was not certain. Only in that last quiet good-bye of hers something in its very self-control had given him hope; for the first time she seemed to shrink a little from showing how much she felt the parting. She was wholly unlike the little girl he had left sobbing in the schoolroom at Sir Matthew's country cottage a few months before.

As he thought of this, a sort of wild desire to succeed in his profession, and to succeed quickly, took possession of him. His present position at the foot of the ladder seemed no longer tolerable. Patient plodding had been well enough earlier in the day, but now the fiery impatience of youth began to get the better of him. He turned eagerly to Ivy. They had by this time reached Westminster Bridge, and the cold, fresh wind from the river and the wider view seemed in harmony with his eager longing for a fuller, freer life, for an escape from the dull routine of his present work.

"Tell me more about this Scotch tour," he said, eagerly. "Do you think there is really a chance of our getting into the company? Does your grandfather think Skoot a decent sort of fellow?"

"Oh yes," said Ivy, her face lighting up radiantly. "Come and talk to him about it. He has seen both the manager and his wife: he used to know them long ago. Oh, do think it over again. Just fancy how beautiful it would be to see Scotland! We would go to Ellen's Isle together and see the Trossachs!"

Ralph laughed. "I fear there are no theatres on the shores of Loch Katrine," he said.

"Well," said Ivy, looking disappointed, "we should at anyrate see mountains, and the travelling would be such fun. I have never been on tour in my life, hardly ever out of London even. Come in and see grandfather and talk about it."

Ralph was persuaded to follow her into the dreary, little house, and much to Ivy's satisfaction her grandfather was awake and seemed in excellent spirits. He was inclined to see everything in the world through rose-coloured spectacles, and was about as fit to advise anyone as a baby of three years old. But his venerable aspect and his smiling benevolent face were, nevertheless, impressive, and Ralph listened eagerly to all that he said. It was quite true that he had known this manager and his wife many years ago: they were most estimable people. Skoot himself had real talent, his wife not much more than a pretty face, but they were thoroughly worthy people; she was a woman with whom he could trust Ivy, he had never heard a word against her. He should miss Ivy, but the landlady would take

care of him and the experience and even the change of air would be very good for the child. He strongly advised Ralph to try and get into the Company, it was a chance which did not occur every day. He would give him a letter of introduction and he could see the manager to-morrow.

At any other time Ralph would have perceived that the old man's advice while he was under the influence of the opium was worth nothing at all. But now the bland, comfortable voice and hopeful auguries weighed with him. He accepted the offer of the introduction, and the Professor, urged by Ivy, who brought him ink and paper and put the pen between his limp, lazy fingers, actually wrote the letter. After that Ralph bade them good-bye, went home to dress for the evening, and then set out for the Marriotts' house where he had been kindly invited to dine; while Ivy went to the dress rehearsal of the pantomime. In the evening he talked over his prospects with Miss Marriott and her niece, giving a very roseate description of the Scotch proposal. The ladies both advised him to close with so good an offer; Mr. Marriott would not commit himself, only counselling him to be sure to have his agreement drawn up in a legal way, and suggesting that he might take the advice of Washington. But this, as Ralph knew, would not be so easy; for Washington was a busy man and though greatly beloved by all his employés had little to do with them personally. Moreover in his heart of

hearts Ralph knew that the great actor would counsel him to plod on patiently, and every moment he felt that this had become less possible to him.

The end of it was that he seized the very first opportunity of seeing Theophilus Skoot, and finding him a very decent-looking man, exceedingly hopeful as to the business they would do in Scotland, and quite willing to come to terms, he signed the agreement for a six months' provincial tour for which he was to receive a salary of two pounds a week, and went back to Paradise Street in excellent spirits to receive Ivy's congratulations.

CHAPTER XI.

"We ought all to count the cost before we enter upon any line of conduct, and I would most strongly warn anyone against the self-deception of fancying that he who wishes to be an ambassador of peace can do otherwise than weep bitterly."

FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE.

DURING the weeks that followed, the only thing which marred Ivy's complete happiness was a certain jealousy of the bright-faced girl they had met at Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day. She was constantly asking Ralph questions about Evereld Ewart; at times he seemed pleased to talk of her, at other times his face would grow grave and he would answer only in monosyllables in a way which perplexed his small devotee not a little. However, she gathered that he did not see any more of his old friend and consoled herself by hurrying off to Whiteley's sale to buy a jacket and hat as much like Evereld's as her purse would afford.

She wore them for the first time on the foggy February morning when Ralph called for her at her grandfather's room to take her to King's Cross. For it had been arranged that she should travel with him to Dumfries where he was to place her under the special care of the manager's wife. The old Professor seemed much depressed when the parting actually came; he

kept looking at the child with wistful eyes and slowly counting out money for the journey with a small, a very small surplus, in case of accidents as he said.

"Have you kept enough for yourself?" asked Ivy, throwing her arms round his neck. "I shall be away six months you know."

"I have enough to last me a couple of months," said the old man, "with what my pupils will bring in. And by that time you will be able to send me a little. You are to have a good salary—a very good salary and no travelling expenses when once you're in Scotland."

"Yes, yes," said Ivy, gaily. "I shall be as rich as a queen when I come back."

The old man's eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, when you come back," he said, huskily, "when you come back. You will do what you can for her if she needs help?" he added, shaking hands tremulously with Ralph.

"I will, indeed," said Ralph, heartily; and there was something in his look and tone which satisfied the Professor and robbed the parting of its worst pain.

Ivy, too much excited to feel the leave-taking, sprang into the cab with a joyous sense that at last, like the heroine of a fairy tale, she was setting out into the world to seek her fortune. It was scarcely right that she should be starting with the fairy prince beside her, he ought to have turned up later in the plot and just at some critical moment. Still, real life could not always

be regulated by the rules of fiction and she reflected that it was much nicer to have him at once.

She leant back in her corner of the third-class carriage, and thought what care he had taken of her, how much more gentle his manner was than the manner of anyone else she knew, and how blissful it would be to act with him for six whole months. He did not talk to her very much, being still busy with his parts, but she was quite content with the mere pleasure of his presence and with the delightful novelty of her first long journey. The Company were to play "Macbeth," "East Lynne," "Guy Mannering," "Rob Roy," "The Man of the World," "Jeannie Deans," and several short plays such as "Cramond Brig," a great favourite in Scotland. Ivy was not well pleased with her parts in "Macbeth," being cast for *Donal Bain*, *Fleance* and Macduff's boy. But she reflected that in the first part she would always come on with Ralph since he was to play *Malcolm*, as well as the part of second witch, while later on she should have the pleasure of being killed by him in his character of first murderer. Ralph seeing irrepressible mirth in her face asked what was amusing her.

"I have to call you 'a shag-haired villain,'" she said, laughing till the tears ran down her face, "and you have to stab me in the fourth act."

"We will have a private rehearsal then, beforehand," said Ralph, smiling. "And you will find my red wig very awe-inspiring, I can tell you."

Ivy looked pityingly at her fellow-travellers, wonder-

ing how they endured their humdrum lives, and full of radiant hopes for her own future.

The fogs of London had soon given place to bright sunshine, and it seemed to her that she had left behind all that was cheerless and was going forth into a glorious world of possibilities. It was certainly a red-letter day in her life's calendar.

The arrival in Scotland, however, was not so cheerful. The cold which they had not greatly noticed in the railway carriage, seemed bitter indeed when they left the train at Dumfries.

It was nearly six o'clock and there was little light left. What there was, revealed snowy roads and slippery pavements. Ivy shivered and clung fast hold of Ralph's hand as they made their way to the manager's rooms, a red-headed porter, much resembling the shag-haired murderer in "Macbeth," going on before them with a luggage truck. He paused at a high house in a particularly dingy street. The door was opened by a shrewd, hard-featured woman who, upon Ralph's inquiry, told them that Mrs. Skoot was in, and ushered them upstairs to a room where the remains of dinner still lingered on the table, and a large, portly lady, with blonde hair and big cow-like eyes, sat with her feet in the fender reading a novel.

"So there you are, dear," she said, greeting Ivy affectionately, but retaining a greasy thumb in the book to keep her place. "I'm glad you've come, for Mr. Skoot has just arranged to have an extra rehearsal to-night."

"Is this Mr. Denmead?" she inquired, extending her hand graciously and taking a rapid survey of him from head to foot. "Have you found rooms yet?"

"No, I have not," said Ralph, his low-toned voice and quiet manner contrasting most curiously with her loud accents. "I was going to ask you if there is any list of lodgings."

"To be sure," she said. "Here it is; you'll find those all very good and reasonable. I've known most of them myself in past years."

Ralph thanked her and turned to go, glancing with some compassion at Ivy. "I shall see you again at rehearsal," he said. "Mind you have something to eat first."

"Oh, yes, I'll see to her," said Mrs. Skoot, vociferously. "She's to board with me you know, her grandfather made me promise that. Half-past seven for the rehearsal, don't forget. Your landlady will be able to direct you to the theatre."

"What an awful woman!" thought Ralph to himself. "The Professor must be out of his mind to let Ivy be with her for six whole months. She may be all that's virtuous—but as a constant companion! Poor Ivy! I wonder how such a decent little fellow as Skoot comes to have such a wife!"

At this point in his reflections they reached the first house on his list, but found the rooms already secured by other members of the company. The same result followed the next application, and yet again the next.

He began to grow tired of wandering about the snowy streets, and catching sight of a card in a window announcing that rooms were to be had, he paused at a neat but unpretentious house and once more made his inquiry.

A very prim-looking widow appeared in answer to his knock; she seemed favourably impressed with his appearance and mentioned her terms.

"That will do very well. I want the rooms for a week," said Ralph, longing to get into a house, for he was half-frozen and very hungry.

"I don't take lodgers that keep late hours," said the widow, cautiously. "I like to lock up by half-past ten, sir."

Ralph made an ejaculation of dismay. "I'm afraid I can't promise that," he said. "I'm an actor, you see, and am not likely to be in by that time."

The woman's whole face stiffened, her very cap seemed to grow as rigid as buckram, her upper lip lengthened. "We only take *Christians* here," she said in a severe way, and then without another word she closed the door.

It was the first time he had ever been made to feel himself an outcast on account of his profession, and for a minute the words, by their injustice, stung him. Then his sense of fun conquered and he laughed to himself as he walked on with bent head in the teeth of the bitter, east wind.

Referring once again to the list of professional

lodgings, he consulted the porter who told him which was the nearest house, and here he at last got taken in, by a dishevelled but smiling landlady.

"There's Mr. Dudley, one of Mr. Skoot's company, in my house now," she said. "Maybe you could share the sitting-room."

Ralph hesitated, but without more ado the woman stepped into her front parlour and put the case to the present occupant.

"Oh, by all means," said a hearty voice; and the door was thrown back and into the narrow passage stepped a tall, powerful-looking man of about forty, his large, clean-shaven face, twinkling eyes, and broad mouth full of good humour. Ralph knew at a glance that it was not at all a face of high type, but it was genial and attractive and it contrasted most singularly with the forbidding face of the widow who only housed Christians.

"Come in, my boy," said the hearty voice; "you look half frozen."

"It was the landlady's proposal," said Ralph. "You are sure you don't mind?"

"To be sure not! 'Mine enemy's dog, though he had bit me, should stand this night against my fire.' Skoot was telling me about you. The little brute has called a special rehearsal; you had better look sharp and get something to eat, for there's no knowing how long they will keep us at it. The Skoots were always great hands at rehearsing."

"You have travelled with them before?"

"Yes, many years ago, and there's not much love lost between us. Shouldn't have taken this engagement now, if I hadn't been out of a shop for some time. I have my doubts if the tour will be a success. Skoot is awfully hampered, you see, by having to run his wife as leading lady."

Ralph prudently forbore to make any comment, but the thought of acting with Mrs. Skoot was a sort of nightmare to him.

"Have the rest of the company all arrived?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. There's little Ivy Grant—she's coming on very well indeed, devilish pretty girl into the bargain. Then there's Miss Myra Kay, a brunette, rather prudish, used to be in Macneillie's company, but lost her health, and is now only just starting afresh. As for the men—well, you'll see for yourself by-and-by—half of them in my opinion are sticks, and the other half roaring ranters. Hulloo, you'll find that a bad speculation. Never order coffee in Great Britain, for they don't know how to make it. Take to whisky, my boy. It's the only thing for strolling players."

"Thanks, I detest it," said Ralph, "and if professional landladies don't understand coffee-making, why, I'll brew it myself as we used to do at Winchester."

"I thought you had been at a public school. What made you take up with the stage? Didn't your people object?"

"I am alone in the world," said Ralph. "My guardian wanted me to be a parson, but I couldn't go in for that, and so, being turned out of his house, I thought I would try to realise an old dream of mine and be an actor."

Dudley had watched him keenly during this speech. He was a man who had led a notoriously evil life, but he had a good deal of kindness in his nature, and there was something in Ralph's transparent honesty, in his evident purity of heart and life that appealed to him. Bad as his own record had been he was wholly without the fiendish desire to drag other men down with him.

"Your dreams were probably very unlike the reality," he said, with a smile. "Are you prepared to rough it? Of course this is above the average run of towns in our tour, indeed, properly speaking it's a theatre town, but Skoot managed to get the date somehow."

They set off together for the rehearsal, and had scarcely opened the stage door when Mrs. Skoot's shrill voice made itself heard. She was vehemently complaining about some mistake made by the baggage man, and the poor harassed culprit stood meekly to receive her angry threats of dismissal, not daring to proffer excuse or explanation. Ivy, looking scared and cold, stood not far off; her whole face lighted up when she caught sight of Ralph, and she stole over to whisper in his ear, "Isn't Mrs. Skoot dreadful?"

"Suggests the queen in 'Alice in Wonderland,'" he replied, smiling. "Off with his head!"

Ivy was obliged to laugh a little.

"That is Miss Myra Kay," she said, indicating a pale, slim girl, who was pacing to and fro, book in hand. "I think she is very selfish; they say she hardly speaks to anyone, but just takes care of herself and is quite wrapped up in her own affairs."

"Take care," said Ralph, warningly; "you may be overheard."

Dudley now introduced him to one or two of the actors, and before long the manager himself arrived. He seemed in good spirits, greeted Ralph pleasantly, pacified his wife, and promptly set them all to work.

Only too soon, however, they realised that the length of the rehearsal depended on Mrs. Skoot and not on her husband. Although it was no business of hers she seemed unable to refrain from constant interruption and fault-finding, and before the evening was over she had reduced Miss Kay to tears, had tormented poor Ivy into the worst of tempers and had goaded most of the men into a state of sullen wrath.

At last, after four hours of this, Mr. Skoot looked at his watch and announced that it was half-past eleven. Time was the only thing which had ever been known to conquer Mrs. Skoot; she wisely bowed to the inevitable, and having reminded Miss Kay that the call was for eleven on the following morning, she allowed herself to

be helped into a handsome fur cloak, and telling Ivy to follow her, quitted the theatre.

Ralph went back to his rooms in low spirits and the next morning did not much mend matters, for they were kept rehearsing from eleven in the morning till five in the afternoon. Had it not been for Dudley's unfailing good humour, his flashes of fun, and his genial kindness, Ralph thought he could not have endured so great a contrast to the whole atmosphere of Washington's theatre.

He began to feel a sort of angry contempt for the manager, who seemed but a tool in the hands of his wife and was quite indifferent to the annoyance she gave to others.

But in the evening when "Macbeth" was given, when, for the first time in his life, he had one of Shakspeare's characters to portray, he forgot all the previous misery. Into the comparatively small part of *Malcolm* he had put an amount of thought and study and imagination which surprised Dudley, and the elder man, as they walked home together, spoke words of hearty commendation and encouragement which cheered the novice's heart as nothing else could have done.

On the day before they were to leave Dumfries for Ayr, it chanced that, being released earlier than usual from rehearsal, Ralph suggested a walk to Ivy. It was the first chance they had had for any sort of relaxation, and Ivy listened with delight to the proposal of a visit to the grave of Burns and to Lincluden Abbey.

She was not at all pleased when as they drew near to the Burns' mausoleum they caught sight of Myra Kay. As yet Ralph had made no way at all with this pale, dark-eyed girl, they had scarcely exchanged a dozen words, and her manner was very reserved and distant. All that he knew about her was the little he had gleaned from the men of the company. It was reported that her marriage was to take place in the summer, and that she was engaged to an actor named Brinton who was now in Macneillie's Company. She had the reputation of being cold, cautious, and conventional, but in comparison with Mrs. Skoot she was so delightful that Ralph felt drawn to her and was chafed by a perfectly clear consciousness that for some reason she disapproved of him. He was pleased when she volunteered a few tepid remarks about Turnerelli's sculpture, and to Ivy's disgust he asked her if she would not join them in their walk to Lincluden Abbey.

She hesitated for a moment, then with a glance at his open, boyish face seemed suddenly to arrive at some determination more important than that of the mere decision to take a walk.

"I will come part of the way with you," she said. "But since my illness I am not much of a walker. It is one of the few grudges I harbour against Mr. Macneillie."

"You were in his Company?"

"Yes, and at Oxford, while playing in an outdoor representation of 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' got

soaked to the skin and had to wear the wet clothes. The rest of them escaped with colds, but I was laid up for six months. The manager was extremely good to me, I must say, and in August I hope to be back again in his Company."

"You like him then as a manager?"

"Yes, indeed, there couldn't be a better. I don't know how I shall ever endure all these months with the Skoots, and had I known that that scoundrel Dudley was to be in the Company I should never have accepted the engagement."

Ralph raised his eyebrows. "That's a severe word," he said.

"It's no more than he deserves," said Myra Kay, frowning. "I am astonished that you can share rooms with him and make him your friend."

"He is very likely no worse than many others," said Ralph, nettled by her tone.

"No worse!" she said, scornfully. "Is it possible you do not know that he is the wretch who figured in the Houston case? You must remember it—the stir was so great, and it is not eighteen months ago."

"I was at school eighteen months ago and never troubled my head with *causes célèbres*."

Myra Kay walked on in silence for a few moments; then she briefly told him the facts of the case and was pleased to see him wince.

"The man has been properly punished," she continued, with satisfaction, "and now no decent manager

will have him—at anyrate, till the details of the case are forgotten. He is desperately hard up for money, and everyone cuts him. I hope, now that you know all this, you will have no more to say to him.”

“Perhaps he has turned over a new leaf,” said Ralph, looking up from the discoloured track where they were walking to the pure white fields beyond.

Myra Kay gave a sarcastic little laugh.

“You are far too innocent, Mr. Denmead,” she said; and Ralph thought there was an unpleasant touch of patronage in her tone. “Does he look as if he were repenting?”

“Men can’t go about in sackcloth and ashes,” said Ralph; “and you surely wouldn’t have him cultivate a face a yard long? It’s his nature to be full of fun, and, for my part, I would far rather have to do with a man who has been openly punished than with a hypocrite who sins with impunity and goes about posing as a philanthropist.”

He thought resentfully of Sir Matthew.

“I can’t think how you can speak to him,” said Myra Kay bitterly. “For your own sake, and for the sake of the profession, you ought to have nothing to do with him. It was not just a common case of wrongdoing—it was a specially atrocious affair throughout. They say you are the son of a clergyman. I should have thought you would have had better judgment than to mix yourself up with such a man.”

“He is precisely the sort of man my father would

have befriended," said Ralph, warmly. "There was nothing of the Pharisee about him. I remember how, when all the village cut a man who had been in prison for some bad offence, he found out the fellow's one vulnerable point—a love of flowers—and had him up with us at the Rectory the whole of one Bank-holiday, pottering about the garden and greenhouse, and as happy as a king in exchanging plants with us, and helping to bud roses."

"That may be well enough for a clergyman, but for you—a mere boy, knowing so little of the world—it is different. You ought not to have chosen such a man as your companion."

"I didn't choose him," said Ralph, with some warmth. "An 'unco guid' widow shut the door in my face, because I was an actor, and said she only took in Christians. Then at the next place I went to they gave me shelter and kind words, and Dudley was goodness itself to me. If I cut him now I should be a contemptible cad."

"Well," said his companion, with a shrug of her shoulders, "you must 'gang your own gait.' But remember that I have warned you."

She turned back soon after this, and Ivy, who had thought the whole discussion very tiresome, skipped for joy when a bend in the road hid her from view.

But Ralph seemed unusually silent, and as they looked at the ruins of the old abbey, Ivy could not at all understand the shadow that seemed to have come over his face.

Not a word ever passed Dudley's lips about his previous life, but there were not lacking people who promptly told him that Ralph Denmead had just learnt all about it; and when they moved on to Ayr, he said in his blunt way:

"You'll not care that we should dig together any longer, I daresay?"

"I had much rather share diggings with you than with any of the others," said Ralph, heartily. "If I'm not in your way, that is? You are the only man who has shown me the least kindness."

Dudley made an inarticulate exclamation. He was more touched than he would have cared to own.

"You are thankful for small mercies," he said, "and gratitude is a rare thing in the profession. But I like you, lad, and am glad to have you as a chum. You shall not have cause to be ashamed of me."

And so throughout the strange vicissitudes of the Scotch tour these two oddly-contrasting characters bore each other company, and for some time Myra Kay kept aloof from them both.

CHAPTER XII.

“All these anxieties will be good for you. They all go to the making of a man—calling out that God-dependence in him which is the only true self-dependence, the only true strength.”

LETTERS OF CHARLES KINGSLEY.

DURING the first month Theophilus Skoot's Company prospered as well as could be expected. At Motherwell, Dumbarton, Kirkaldy and Dunfermline they had full houses, but after that their luck seemed to desert them. It was now past the middle of March, and the old proverb,

“As the light lengthens
The cold strengthens,”

was fulfilling itself in very bitter fashion. Perhaps people were disinclined to turn out of their comfortable homes on such bleak evenings; at anyrate, the time at Stirling proved a dead failure, and Perth was wrestling with the influenza demon, and had little leisure to bestow on strolling players.

It was here that one evening Ralph, for the first time, learnt what it is to work without a salary.

He was sitting on a basket, waiting for his cue, with “Pendennis” to cheer him into forgetfulness of

fatigue and cold, when Dudley returned to the dressing-room, with an odd look lurking about the corners of his mouth.

"The days of dearth begin," he said, in sepulchral tones.

"What do you mean?" said Ralph, laughing.

"It's no laughing matter. Skoot politely asks if we can do with a little less this week as business has been bad. Our salaries will get small by degrees."

"You think this is only the beginning of bad times?" said Ralph, blankly.

"I'm not surprised," said Dudley; "I was always doubtful whether Skoot would hold out long. But we may have better luck at St. Andrews."

"And if not, how are we to live?" asked Ralph, recollecting how small a sum he had to fall back upon.

"Why, my dear boy, we must live like the birds of the air, who eat other folk's property, and then fly away."

Ralph looked gloomy.

"Well, after all," he said, "the debts will virtually be Skoot's, not ours. And, as you say, other places may not be so bad as Perth has been."

This was exactly what the manager observed as they journeyed on from town to town. He was always apologetic, always bland and pleasant; but the salaries rapidly dwindled away. In other respects, however, the tour was less unpleasant than at first. The rehearsals were shorter, and Mrs. Skoot did not venture to irritate

them quite so much, but solaced herself instead with whisky. Moreover, their common trouble formed a sort of bond of union between the members of the Company; they grumbled together, and cheered each other up; they were extraordinarily kind in helping one another; all the little jealousies and quarrels were forgotten in the general anxiety and distress. As to Myra Kay, she was like another being altogether; she nursed Ivy through a long and tedious cold, she forgave Ralph for his friendship with Dudley, and she discussed ways and means in the most helpful fashion. Her experience and good advice were of considerable use to Ralph, while, when their prospects were at the darkest, Ivy managed to extract comfort from dreams about the future, and would listen by the hour to Myra's plans for the summer, and to discussions about her wedding and her trousseau.

And so the weary weeks dragged on, until at last, towards the end of April, they found themselves at Inverness. By this time they were all beginning to grow desperate for want of money, and Ralph, after a hard struggle with himself, conquered his pride and wrote to old Mr. Marriott, telling him of the plight he was in. It was not until the last day of their engagement at Inverness that the reply, bearing the name of the firm on the envelope, was placed in his hands. He tore it open eagerly and turned pale as he read the contents:

"BASINGHALL STREET, E. C.

"27th April.

"DEAR SIR,

"With reference to your letter of the 25th inst., I beg to inform you that Mr. Marriott has been very dangerously ill with influenza, and to recruit his health he has been ordered to take a voyage to Australia. I regret that in his absence I do not feel myself at liberty to make you any advance. I am, dear sir, yours truly,

"W. G. MAUNDER."

The next day they moved on to Elgin. The manager looked miserable and depressed; Mrs. Skoot, though not quite sober, read novels more assiduously than ever, and among the actors there were loud complaints, and angry threatenings of a strike. At Elgin the audiences were better than might have been expected, and the Skoots seemed to revive a little as they moved on to the neighbouring town of Forres. But the luckless Company still toiled unpaid.

Ralph's patience was now almost exhausted. Ivy had received piteous letters telling of her grandfather's difficulties, and every day it seemed less and less probable that they would ever again receive their salaries from the manager.

Forres certainly did not look like a place where they would attract large audiences, and an indescribable feeling of hopelessness stole over him as he gazed at the old gabled houses and at the one long, irregular

street which formed the chief part of the town. How much longer could he possibly endure the weary, distasteful life? The halls with their miserable accommodation behind the scenes—for in few towns had they found a proper theatre;—the cheap lodgings with their dirty rooms; the daily marketing under difficulties; and the revolting spectacle of Mrs. Skoot drowning her discomfiture in drink—all these had become intolerable.

“Let us go for a walk,” said Ivy, despairingly. “At anyrate out of doors we can have air and sunshine—we shall have enough of our wretched rooms later on.”

“Come and see the river,” said Myra Kay. “They say there are lovely views by the Findhorn.”

Ralph consented, and the three walked out together into the country, and did their best to forget the troubles that hemmed them in, as they wandered among the flowery fields, where Ivy gathered violets and primroses to her heart's content. Presently by the river, among the soft early green of the bushes, they came to a fallen tree, and here they established themselves while Ralph read to them. They had indulged in two or three of Dickens' novels at an old bookstall during their days of plenty, and when fortune frowned upon them these shabby volumes had proved a perfect godsend. They had solaced many a cold journey and brightened many a dreary lodging-house, and they helped now to distract them from the thought of their daily increasing troubles.

It seemed to Ivy when she looked back afterwards,

that this afternoon by the Findhorn was the last really happy day she was ever to know. She sat cosily ensconced on the tree trunk with her lap full of flowers which she delighted in arranging; and Ralph lay on the grass at her feet with his head propped against the smooth surface of the fallen beech tree. She noticed how the short waves of his crisp, brown hair contrasted with the silver-grey of the bark, and how the careworn look which had grown upon him during the tour was entirely banished now as flashes of mirth passed over his face, caused by the sayings of Grip the raven.

Myra Kay sat just beyond him; she was knitting socks for her *fiancé*, listening at times to the reading, but more often dreaming of her own future. Everywhere there was that sense of hope and joyous expectation that seems to belong to the spring-time: the birds sang as Ivy had never heard them sing before; the lambs frisked delightfully in the soft, green meadows near their somewhat uninteresting mothers; and into her half-taught, eager mind there somehow floated new ideas of the meaning of "green pastures and still waters," and a firmer confidence in a Shepherd who would not forget even the members of a travelling company in grievous straits up in the north of Scotland.

"Oh, don't let us go just yet!" she exclaimed, as Ralph closed the book. "It can't be time to go back to those stuffy rooms."

"I'm in no hurry," said Ralph, stretching himself, and falling back into a more comfortable attitude.

He could not see Ivy's face, but he could see her little, slender fingers as they pulled the petals off a daisy. The result seemed to displease her; she threw away the remains of the flower, and gathering another diligently pulled off each pink-tipped petal, but again threw the stalk from her with a little impatient gesture. Then she began upon a third, and had become absorbed in her counting, when suddenly she felt Ralph's hand lay hold of hers.

"Caught in the act," he said, laughing. "Don't you know that fortune-telling is illegal?"

"Not if you tell your own," said Ivy.

Something in her voice made him look at her, and for the first time in her little childish face he detected an expression which made him clearly understand that he was not dealing with a mere girl but with a woman. Long ago he had realised that her hard experience of life had robbed Ivy of the innocent ignorance which had kept Evereld so young; but he had naturally fallen into the habit of treating her as he would have treated any other girl of fifteen with whom he was brought into constant companionship. Thinking it over now it suddenly occurred to him that during the Scotch tour Ivy had lost her brisk, managng way, that she was very different from the independent little being who ordered the Professor's affairs for him, that she had become unnaturally fond of being helped and protected. An uncomfortable fear crossed his mind, but he thought it best to laugh and try to change the subject.

"Are you doing the old thing that Evereld and I used to be fond of!—'Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor?' And have you always been fated to wed the thief that you throw away one daisy after another?"

"That's a silly old rhyme," said Ivy. "Of course I should never think of marrying anyone who wasn't in the profession."

"Oh, that's quite a mistake," said Ralph, lightly, determined that he must be cruel only to be kind. "Two of a trade seldom agree, you know. You should marry a dreamy philosopher who needed waking up, and being looked after."

Ivy blushed, and was silent, and Ralph was not sorry to be taken to task by Myra Kay for his rash assertion that two of a trade never agreed. They fell into a merry bantering discussion during which Ivy recovered herself.

After all, she reflected, why should she be unhappy because he had teased her a little? His words no doubt meant nothing at all; she would not spoil this happy afternoon by tormenting herself.

"To-morrow's my birthday," she said, gaily, as they walked back to Forres. "I'm going to be sixteen. There's no rehearsal, and I vote that we three have a real picnic."

"Carried unanimously," said Ralph. "We might go as far as this Heronry they speak of. The longer we are out of our dismal diggings the better."

The play that night was "Macbeth," and anything

more unlike the arrangements at Washington's theatre it would be impossible to conceive. Mr. Skoot was apologetic, Mrs. Skoot endeavoured to be very affable, and the Company with that readiness to perceive fun, and the real good-nature which never failed them in an emergency, made the best of the many discomforts. They dressed behind screens, they laughed and joked, they had wild hunts for lost belongings, and they chattered incessantly between the acts under cover of the noisiest piano-playing which could be produced by one of the ladies, who, with a waterproof cloak over her costume, did duty as the entire orchestra.

A choice selection of Scotch airs was being hammered out at the close of the Fourth Act, when Ralph, who was groping in a heap of miscellaneous garments in hopes of rescuing the wig he had worn as first murderer, and had hastily thrown off during a desperately hurried change into *Malcolm's* attire, found himself close to Dudley.

"The manager is positively enjoying himself," said the comedian. "Skoot is after all a wonderful man. I shouldn't wonder if he was persuading himself that this confounded tour will prove a success. That fellow lives on dreams. His wife is the one for business."

At that moment Mrs. Skoot, in the most elegant of stage night-dresses, and with her taper all ready to be lighted at the right moment, appeared for the sleep-walking scene. Ralph often wondered what effect she had at a distance; the near view of her was appalling.

"I am afraid you have a great deal to put up with," she said, in unusually gracious tones, smiling in a ghastly way beneath her paint. "But we must all learn to take the fortune of war. Our next place will be comfortable enough."

They were joined just then by Myra Kay in the costume of the *Gentlewoman-in-Waiting*."

Mrs. Skoot, who, as a rule, was at daggers drawn with her, accosted her now pleasantly enough.

"I hear that you and Ivy have planned an excursion for to-morrow?" she said. "Come and breakfast with us at half-past nine before the start. And you, too, Mr. Denmead."

They accepted the invitation in some surprise, and as the curtain was rung up Mrs. Skoot requested Dudley to light her taper, and presently sailed on to the stage for her great scene, leaving them in astonishment at her unwonted good-humour.

The next day Ralph went, as he had promised, to the manager's rooms in time for breakfast. He was within a few yards of the door when he came upon the heavy man, and his son, a young and very indifferent actor who usually played four or five small parts.

"Have you heard the news?" they exclaimed. "The Company's dried up."

"What?" said Ralph, in dismay.

"The manager has absconded," said the heavy man, pompously. "Went off by the first train this morning. It seems that last night when we were all safely out of

the way the baggage man took everything to the station. Then Skoot and his wife stole out of their lodgings early this morning without rousing a soul, and here we are landed high and dry in the north-east of Scotland. Pleasant prospect, isn't it?"

Ralph felt indeed that they were in a desperate plight. He moved on mechanically to the open door of the manager's rooms, and caught sight of a little group in the entrance passage.

The landlady, shrill-voiced and indignant, was telling the whole story to Myra Kay; and Ivy, with an open letter in her hand, and traces of tears on her little, piquant face stood close by.

She was the first to catch sight of him, and hastened forward to greet him.

"Oh, Ralph, I'm so glad you have come!" she exclaimed, piteously. "What am I to do? What can I do?"

CHAPTER XIII.

“Who bides his time—he tastes the sweet
Of honey in the saltiest tear;
And though he fares with slowest feet,
Joy runs to meet him, drawing near;
The birds are heralds of his cause,
And like a never-ending rhyme
The roadsides bloom in his applause,
Who bides his time.”

J. W. RILEY.

“HAVE you had bad news from home?” asked Ralph, taking the letter which Ivy held towards him.

“Yes,” she said, in a broken voice. “They have had to move my grandfather to the hospital.”

It was but too clear, as Ralph at once perceived from the letter, that the old Professor was never likely to recover, and that Ivy’s home had ceased to exist. The landlady wrote to demand rent, and since it was impossible to pay this, there would doubtless be a sale of the Professor’s few belongings.

And here was this pretty girl of sixteen, stranded, without a penny in her possession, in a remote Scotch town, where it was impossible to meet with an engagement.

“What am I to do?” she said, lifting her piteous

eyes to his with an appeal that moved him more than he quite liked. He wished that he had not guessed her secret on the previous day, and that he could treat her once more in the matter-of-fact-elder-brotherly fashion which he had once adopted. But this was no longer possible; nay, he felt an almost irresistible longing to say to her: "I will take care of you. We will set the world at defiance, and bear our troubles together."

Fortunately he thought of Evereld, and instantly tried to picture her in the same plight. How would he have felt towards a man who had taken advantage of her poverty and helplessness to place her in a position which must, more or less, have compromised her?

He folded the letter and gave it back.

"Don't worry yourself more than you can help," he said, kindly. "I will talk things over with the others, and we will manage somehow to get you back to London."

But discussion threw very little light on the main difficulty of how to raise the necessary money. Every member of the company was desperately poor, and although Myra Kay offered to take charge of Ivy as far as London, she had only just enough money to pay for her own railway ticket. Some intended to go back to Inverness, others were setting out for Edinburgh or Glasgow, and all were grumbling loudly, and anathematising the Skoots, who could scarcely have chosen a more inconvenient place than Forres for their flight.

He had counted a good deal on Dudley's good-

nature; but the comedian proved the most unsatisfactory adviser of all.

"Oh, don't worry your head about Ivy Grant," he said. "Depend upon it such a pretty girl will win her way somehow or other. It's much more to the point what you and I are to do."

Ralph did not stay to argue the question. Myra Kay was to leave by the next train for the south, and he was determined that somehow or other Ivy must go with her. He went up to his room, threw most of his possessions into a portmanteau, and went to try his fortune at the pawnbrokers. It was broad daylight, but he had long ago ceased to feel any shame at being reduced to such straits. He went to-day, however, with a heavy heart; for he was only too well aware that he could not hope to raise much money on the few shabby clothes, and the wigs, shoes, and such like, which had supplemented the theatrical costumes provided by Skoot. Many weeks before, his father's watch and chain had been parted with, so that he had nothing of much value, and his spirits sank lower and lower as the pawnbroker checked off the garments one by one at terribly small prices.

In the very atmosphere of the shop there seemed something depressing; tales of sordid misery seemed woven in with the shabby rugs and carpets, the stacks of heterogeneous clothing; and tragedies seemed bound up with the workmen's tools, the musical instruments, the relics of household furniture.

"Twenty-five shillin's and saxpence," said the master of the shop. "Will I be makin' oot the teeckets?"

"What's the price of a third single to London?" asked Ralph. "I must raise enough for that."

"Ye canna do it, sir, not with these, it's juist beyon' ony man's contrivin'. Why I'm thinkin' the teecket to London will be a matter of twa punds."

He appealed to his assistant.

"It's preceesely forty-two shillin' and saxpence," said the young man, regarding the actor with some interest.

"There's still the portmanteau," said Ralph.

It was an old one of the rector's, solid and good of its kind.

"I'll gie ye a couple o' shillin's for it," said the pawnbroker. "But ye'll no be gettin' to London, sir, upon twenty-seven and saxpence."

"It must be done," said Ralph, with a determined look which took the Scotchman's fancy. "Make out those tickets, and I'll be with you again in five minutes."

"The laddie's weel-bred," said the old man to himself. "He'll win his way depend on it, there's grit in him. Yon's none of your false French polishin'; it's sound, good breedin' and grit."

Ralph, true to his word, appeared again in a few minutes carrying a Gladstone bag, an overcoat, and a mackintosh. The bag with the change of linen in it which he had hoped to keep, went for a little more than

he had expected, and with the overcoat brought in enough money for the journey, and ninepence to spare. He decided not to part with the mackintosh, and gathering up his sheaf of tickets, bade the old Scotsman good-day, and went at once to the manager's deserted rooms.

Ivy had grown tired of talking to the landlady, and being in spite of her troubles exceedingly hungry, had taken her place at the forlorn breakfast table, and was trying to find comfort in a cup of cold coffee.

"Come, that's a good idea," said Ralph, cheerfully. "And now I think of it, I, too, am hungry. Why should we not eat? After Mrs. Skoot's pressing invitation it's a clear duty!"

Ivy smiled, and began to fill his cup for him.

"What do the rest of the company think I had better do?" she asked, anxiously.

"They all agree that you had better go back to London with Miss Kay. She will not be able to take you home with her, but I've been thinking it over, and I'm sure your best way will be to go to my old landlady Mrs. Dan Doolan. She is the soul of good-nature and as long as they have a crust in the house they will share it with you."

"But I don't know them, and I can't go and beg," said Ivy, with an air of distaste.

"I will write a letter to them which will explain everything," said Ralph. "They are good, trustworthy people who will see that no harm happens to you; they

will, I daresay, house you while you look for another engagement."

"How am I to get the money for my ticket?"

"I will see to that for you."

"But you have no money?"

"Are you so sure of that?" said Ralph, smiling as he rattled the coins in his pocket cheerfully.

The girl's face brightened. "You have enough for both of us?"

"I am going to stay in Scotland. I shall keep enough to get along with, you needn't be anxious."

But this was quite too much for Ivy, she hid her face and burst into tears.

"I can't go alone," she sobbed. "I won't take your money, and leave you behind in this horrid place. Oh, please, please let us stay together."

For a minute he wavered—the sight of her tears was almost more than he could endure; the sunshine streaming in through the uncurtained window turned her brown hair to gold, and revealed in a way that half-dazzled him the wonderful grace of every line of her figure. With an effort, he turned away, and began doggedly to pace the room till he recovered himself, and, with that instinct for straightforward dealing which always characterised him, frankly answered her suggestion.

"That would never do: you will see if you think for a minute. You are no longer a child, and people would say horrible things about you."

"But you always say we are not to trouble about slanders. You don't like conventional people, and yet here you would have me made miserable, for fear unkind tongues should talk."

"We can't throw aside all conventions," said Ralph; "many of them are good and useful in their way. Are you and I so superhuman that we can afford to do without all safeguards? I know you think me hard-hearted, but some day you'll thank me for persuading you to go with Miss Kay."

Ivy shook her head. "It's because you don't really like me; you mean to be kind, just kind and nothing more. I hate your kindness!"

All the grief and love and passion that was pent up in her heart seemed to break loose into this wild little speech.

Ralph began to pace the room again, he understood her only too well, and he was sorely perplexed as to what he should do. At last he came to the somewhat original determination to treat her as he would have liked in her place to be treated. He sat down by her, and said quietly:

"We are all of us unhinged this morning, but I want you, Ivy, to try and see things as they really are. I'm going to tell you what not another soul in the world knows, for it will help you to see how we stand. I have a friend in England who is as yet only my friend, but I'm presumptuous enough to dream—to hope that some day she will be my wife."

"Then very naturally you can't care much what happens to other girls," said Ivy, perversely.

"I care a hundred times more," said Ralph. "It is just through her that I have learnt to reverence all women. Were she in your plight up here in Forres should I not think any man a brute who risked her good name, who didn't do his utmost to shield her and help her unselfishly?"

Ivy did not reply; her wistful blue eyes were fixed on his now with the questioning look of a child who is trying to grasp some quite new idea. She had seen all through her precocious childhood and girlhood a great deal that called itself love, but was only selfishness and animal passion, and now through her sorrow and disappointment she was beginning faintly to perceive another kind of love altogether, a love that was divine and ennobling. It was just a far-away glimpse such as she had gained of the landscape one day, when, in spite of cloudy weather, they had climbed Moncrieffe Hill, and as the mist every now and then cleared off for a few minutes, they had seen the sun shining on lovely scenery far, far in the distance. She had the same sense now that the glimpse of love she had gained was real and true, and that the mist was a mere passing discomfort.

"I am sorry I was angry," she exclaimed. "I don't mean what I said, then. I like you to be my friend and to help me—at least if it's right for me to let you."

"Of course it's right," said Ralph. "Didn't your

grandfather trust me to take you down to Scotland and place you with Mrs. Skoot? I owe it to him since she has deserted you, to see you safely back in London, and I will write a line at once to Mrs. Dan Doolan explaining things."

"Thank-you," she said, in a sad, meek little voice. And as he began to write, her little, sensible, managing ways came back to her and she began to cut thick slices of bread and butter and wrap them up for the journey. She then consoled the landlady with her travelling trunk, packed her few possessions into the smallest compass possible, and by the time Myra Kay called for her, was waiting ready dressed, looking, indeed, very pale, but with an air of determination about her firm little mouth which Ralph could not help admiring.

There was a great bustle of departure, but when he had posted his letters and had taken Ivy's ticket and stood alone outside the railway carriage with nothing more to do, a sense of loneliness began to steal over him. For the first time it occurred to anyone to ask what plans he had made for himself.

"Where are you going, Mr. Denmead?" said Myra Kay.

"I'm going to take a walking tour," said Ralph, lightly; "probably I shall work my way down to Glasgow, and try for an engagement there. By-the-bye, where is Macneillie's Company now?"

"Just dispersed," said Myra, cheerfully, as she re-

flected that her lover would be in London to meet her. "Macneillie generally winds up soon after Whitsuntide and starts again at the beginning of August. He has promised to take me on again then."

"If he has an opening you might say a word for me," said Ralph, "and Ivy, let me have a line to say how you get on. I shall have to call for letters at the Stirling post-office, for I hope to hear of an engagement by that time."

Just at that moment he was hailed by a familiar voice from a smoking carriage, and looking round he saw Dudley leaning out of the window.

"So you are off to the south, too!" he said. "Lucky fellow, how did you manage it?"

The train had already begun to move, but the comedian with a beaming face still leant out of the window describing to the last moment the extraordinary run of luck he had had at billiards.

"Go and play the same game," he counselled; "it's the only way to raise the wind. Good-bye, my boy! Meet again in better times."

He waved his hand cheerfully and was borne away, but the thing which lingered longest in Ralph's sight was Ivy's wistful little face, as to the very last she gazed back at him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"And forth into the fields I went,
And nature's living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.

"I wonder'd at the bounteous hours
The slow results of winter showers;
You scarce could see the grass for flowers.

"I wonder'd while I paced along;
The woods were fill'd so full with song,
There seem'd no room for sense of wrong."

"The Two Voices," TENNYSON.

It was just ten minutes past eleven by the station clock when Ralph, having parted with his companions, found himself outside in the highroad. He felt horribly desolate, and stood for a minute or two dismally contemplating a flaming red and yellow placard of a scene in "Cramond Brig," which they had invariably played after "East Lynne." Wretched as his experiences with the Company had been, they had at least been less dreary than solitude. He sorely missed Ivy's bright face, and the comedian's cheerful companionship. There was a certain bitterness too in the reflection that no one had taken much thought of what was to become of him, and that even Dudley, who had been kind and friendly enough in the past, had never

dreamt of foregoing his journey to London and of taking two tickets to Glasgow.

With a last look at Forres he turned his steps southward and somewhat drearily set off on the first stage of his journey. He meant to reach Grantown that evening, and Grantown appeared to be at least two and twenty miles off. Fortunately the weather was all in his favour: it was one of those mornings of early May when the sun is bright and warm and the air deliciously fresh, and he had not gone far along the uphill road before his spirits revived. After all he was young and in good health, and there was something not altogether unpleasant in entire independence. He reflected with a laugh that although a change of clothes might be desirable, a knapsack would have been heavy to carry, that the great coat though useful on a cold night would have been unbearable at the present moment, and that the sixpence left to him after stamping the letter to his landlady and letters to the managers of an Edinburgh and a Glasgow theatre, would at anyrate keep him for a few days from actual starvation. Then for awhile he forgot his difficulties altogether in sheer enjoyment of the country. The lovely outline of the Cluny hills, the glimpses of the river Findhorn, the beautiful parks surrounding many stately houses, looked their very best on this perfect spring morning. He caught the glowing sunlight through the young leaves just unfolded and thought that the delicate tracery of dark boughs seemed as though ablaze with emeralds. He had walked for

about two hours when he came to a little country church and burial ground, and paused partly to rest, partly to look up at the beautiful viaduct which at a great height spanned the river Divie.

“Ay, ay,” said a voice, that seemed to rise from one of the graves. “There are many tourists that stop to admire yonder seven-arched work of man’s devising, but few—very few that pay much heed to the works of the Almighty.”

There was a strong northern accent about the words; and the careful, precise English showed that the speaker was better used to reading than to speaking the language.

Ralph had started a little at the suddenness with which the silence had been broken, and on turning round, he saw a venerable-looking old man with bushy grey hair and beard, and shrewd yet kindly glance. Evidently he was the minister of this place. Ralph raised his hat, and smiled a little.

“May not the skill of man be taken as one of God’s works?” he said.

“No doubt, no doubt,” replied the minister. “When rightly applied that is to say. But railways, sir, are the devil’s own weapon; they desolate and mar the country they enter; they bring to the country folk all the evil of the towns and cities. You have a prophet in your own land that has told you this in plain words, but you will not heed him, but go on multiplying the works of evil to your own undoing.”

"On such a day as this I am all in favour of walking," said Ralph, amused at the minister's earnestness.

"Sir! it's a grand exercise, you'll not be finding a better; there are your bicycles that bend a man's back like an overstrung bow, and your tricycles that are no light diversion to push up our Scottish hills, and there are those works of the evil one which whirl you through creation at such a pace that you are no wiser at the end of a journey than you were at the beginning of it. But a man that walks, sir, must be blind and deaf if he's not a better man after his walk than he was before."

"Well, I shall be able to test your theory," said Ralph. "For I am walking as far as Glasgow."

"And which way will you be taking?" asked the minister. "You should spend a few days among the Grampians, if you are anything of a mountaineer."

"I must push on as fast as I can," said Ralph; "and by the most direct route. They told me at Forres that after Grantown I had better make for Kingussie."

"If you'll come into the Manse, I will show you on the map the very route I have often travelled myself in past days," said the minister. And Ralph, nothing loth, followed him into his house, and was soon poring over a big ordnance map, and receiving some very helpful information from the old man.

They were interrupted before long by a knock at the door, and the appearance of an aged housekeeper with a large, well-fed, tabby cat in her arms.

"The feesh is on the table, sir, and it's a sair temptation for puss, puir wee thing, starving hungry as she is."

Ralph sprang up to take leave, glancing humourously at the fat tabby, who was in such haste for her food. The minister noted the glance; he noted, too, for the first time, the extreme shabbiness of his guest's clothes, and certain signs of under-feeding about him.

"We'll no keep puss waiting, Tibbie," he said. "But just lay another place at the table, for I hope this gentleman has time to dine with me." Then as Ralph hesitated to accept the hospitality he overruled all objections by adding: "You'll be doing me a real kindness if you'll stay, for it is not very often that I get a visitor to talk with in this country place."

He led the way as he spoke into the adjoining room, a plainly-furnished parlour with nothing ornamental about it, but with a certain charm of its own, nevertheless from its pure cleanliness and simplicity. Puss occupied a chair on her master's right hand, and purred loudly through the somewhat long grace, and Tibbie, having provided for the wants of the visitor, left them to enjoy the meal in peace. For dinner at the Manse was not an affair with many courses, but just freshly-caught fish from the river, baps baked that morning by the housekeeper, a salad from the garden, and the remains of a cheese which had been a present to the minister on New Year's day.

"Now the majority of travellers, as I was saying,"

continued the minister, "are just hurried over the viaduct, causing us nothing but distraction and annoyance, but a pedestrian like yourself really sees the place, and cheers the day for us and brings us something to think about.

"I spent the first thirteen years of my life in a country rectory," said Ralph. "And remember what a quiet time we had."

"And are you studying for the ministry?" asked the old man.

"No," said Ralph. "My guardian gave me the chance of doing that, but I think you will agree that one can't be a parson just for the sake of earning a living."

"Certainly not, sir, certainly not. You are quite in the right. No man should take up such work without a clear call; far better seek some other profession."

"That is what I did," said Ralph, colouring a little. "But I know very well that you'll not approve of my profession. I am an actor, and am on my way now to Stirling where I hope to hear of a fresh engagement either at Edinburgh or at Glasgow."

Surprise, consternation, regret, were plainly visible in the old man's face. He said nothing for a moment, it bewildered him to find that this young fellow with his straightforward manner and ingenuous modesty, should have anything to do with the stage.

"I am thinking that you will be asking me as you did of the viaduct—may not the skill of man be taken as

one of God's works?" he said, thoughtfully. "And I'm fain to confess that I have ever considered theatres as the highway to hell, and actors as so many servants of the devil. May God forgive me if I have failed in charity and dealt out harsh judgment to them."

So they fell into talk together, and Ralph told of the landlady who had shut the door in his face, and assumed that he was no Christian. He told of some of the arrangements at the two theatres in London with which he was acquainted. He told more than one story which he had heard from Myra Kay of the good that Hugh Macneillie had done. And the old minister listened and pondered these strange sayings in his heart, looking all the time with a sort of wistfulness at the fresh, hopeful face opposite him—a face which somehow haunted him long after Ralph had left the Manse.

"He had been through a hard apprenticeship, and I doubt he had little enough in his pockets," reflected the old man as he paced the bare, little parlour.

"He'd been defrauded of his pay and had looked on the evil as well as on the good, but still he pleaded like a born advocate for his calling—his art; and spite of his troubles there was a blithe look in his face which sore perplexes me."

He walked to and fro many times, finally he took a Bible from the shelf and turned over the pages until he came to the words he sought. They were these: "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

"It was *that* his look kept bringing before me," he

said to himself, and he sighed because he knew that there was too little of the element of joy in his life, and that he plodded on from day to day, considering religion a privilege and a duty, but somehow missing the gladness which might have been his. Ralph meanwhile, much refreshed by the rest and food and by his host's kindly words, tramped on contentedly enough through the wild, desolate country which led to Grantown. The sun was just setting as he reached the village; workmen were making their way homeward, some children with little, dusty, bare feet were playing battledore and shuttlecock in the road, the ruddy light on their hair looked like burnished copper.

"Come awa bairns, it's time ye were a' in bed," called a comely mother standing in the open doorway of one of the houses.

"Just a wee while," pleaded the children.

"Ah!" she replied, yielding under protest. "You're an awfu' care to me!"

But there was love and pride in her eyes nevertheless, as she watched their play.

Ralph sighed a little as he tramped on. He was now both hungry and tired, and began to consider his plans; it was quite clear that he could not afford the price of a bed, and it was still too light to venture upon such shelter as might be found in barns or under hedges. He turned into a baker's shop, secured a good-sized stale loaf, and then for want of anything better to do, found his way to the railway station where he amused himself

by looking out trains which he had no money to travel by, after which, having had the good fortune to find a *Glasgow Herald* in the waiting-room, left behind by some traveller, he read until it was quite dusk. The quiet little place roused into a sort of activity about a quarter past eight when two trains arrived, one from Perth, the other from Elgin, and Ralph sauntered on to the platform with a faint hope that he might see some face that he knew—he could almost in his loneliness have welcomed the Skoots! But very few passengers alighted, and directly they had been seen off the premises the porters began to lock up for the night—no more trains were expected.

“After all,” reflected Ralph, as he left the village behind him, and tramped along the highroad in the gathering gloom, “if I had gone out to the colonies I should think nothing of camping out for a night. There’s no more disgrace in it here than there. And luckily there’s no law, as there is in England, against sleeping under a hedge, I can’t be had up as a vagrant in Scotland. Now, if only I had not been forced to sell Macneillie’s knife it would have been handy enough for cutting this loaf which must certainly have come out of the Ark.” He wrenched off the top with difficulty and laughed to himself as he thought how horrified Lady Mactavish would be, could she see him now in the shabbiest of clothes, tramping a dusty road and munching stale bread as he went.

“Most certainly I should have Sir Matthew’s charitable

dole of ten pounds thrust into my hand," he said, with an exulting sense that come what would, he would never apply for that relief. "Rather than go to him for help, I would willingly turn into that Refuge for destitute men at Edinburgh, which we saw as we walked down the Canongate." He shuddered a little as the recollection came to him of the sort of man he had seen seeking shelter there. At any rate out of doors he would have fresh air and no companions in misery.

He must have walked nearly five miles from the village, before he saw in the faint starlight a large farmhouse with many outbuildings. "This is the place for me," he thought, making his way into the yard: but he had yet to learn the difficulties before him. The doors of a hopeful-looking barn were securely fastened, and, as he crossed the yard to some other outbuildings, up sprang a huge dog from his kennel, with angry growls and fierce barks. He walked up to the mastiff, with swift, light steps, patted its head, fondled its ears, and explained to it the situation. The dog was mollified, understood that the intruder's intentions were honourable, and even licked his hand, which Ralph took very kindly.

Looking round searchingly, he made out, at last, a sort of open shed, near the stables, and moving across to this, had the good fortune to discover a cart with trusses of hay in it.

"This will exactly suit me, my friend," he said, with a farewell pat to the dog. "May you sleep as com-

fortably in that lordly kennel of yours!" And, so saying, he climbed up into the cart, stowed the remains of his loaf in a safe place, and with deft hands had soon made himself as warm a bed as could be desired, out of the hay.

He slept soundly, being healthily tired with his long walk—so soundly, indeed, that though cocks and hens and ducks and turkeys, all began, at an early hour, to blend their voices in a countrified, but scarcely musical chorus, he heard nothing. In his dream, Miss Brompton, in a waterproof, was thumping out "Scots wha hae," between the acts; and presently, when certain strange rumblings slightly disturbed him, he dreamed that it was the thunder in the first scene of "Macbeth," finally waking himself up by laughing at the comical sight presented by Mrs. Skoot as she vainly tried to drag him out of his witch's cloak that he might appear as *Malcolm*. Her angry, impatient face convulsed him with mirth, and it was with no small bewilderment that he awoke to find himself struggling out of a heap of hay, while from above, the amazed face of a red-whiskered man gazed down upon him. The rustic's round, light-grey eyes had a scared look, and Ralph suddenly remembered where he was, and began to apologise and explain. The cart no longer stood in the shed, but had rumbled out into the highroad, and the driver had evidently no intention of proceeding, while his uncanny visitant still remained among the hay.

"Gude preserve us!" he exclaimed, "I was thinkin'

the cart was bewitched when I harkened to yon fearsome laughter."

Ralph shook off the hay and leapt lightly into the road; his agility and grace seemed to strike still deeper awe into the heart of the countryman, who stared like one fascinated.

"A doot you hef brought luck with you to the farm, sir," he said, looking down into the comely face and laughing eyes of his astonishing guest. "And there would hef ben a bowl o' milk set for you had you bin expeckit. But it will be a fery long time since the Brownies hef veesited us, and there's bin nae luck aboot the farm for mony a year."

"Great Scott! the man thinks I'm a 'Robin Good-fellow' or a warlock!" thought Ralph, highly amused. "And he's far too much afraid of me to offer me a ride in his cart."

"I'm just a wayfaring man," he tried to explain. "Very grateful for the shelter of your hay-cart on a cold night."

"Oh, ay," said the carter, still evidently holding to his own opinion. "And it is fery glad we are to be seein' you, sir. And a ken weel that it's na for human bein's to come into our place at night. Lassie wad bark till ilka soul in the hoose was wakened, and she will be flying at the thrapple o' ony mortal man. But dogs hef aye descreemination to tell the Brownies when they see them. I will be wishin' you gude day, sir."

And so saying, he drove off hastily, leaving Ralph to

trudge along in solitude, until catching sight of a stream at a little distance from the road, he reflected that the best things in life were to be had free of charge, and that a morning bath would freshen him for the day.

As for the driver he chanced to look back from a distance, and catching sight of his uncanny visitor just as he took a header into the water, was for ever confirmed in his opinion that he had seen and spoken with a Brownie.

The second day's walk proved even more enjoyable than the first had done, except that there was no kindly old minister to provide a midday meal. But the sense of freedom, the bracing air, and the loveliness of the road beside the river Spey, with glimpses every now and then of the Cairn Gorm range, were things to be remembered through a lifetime. With Aviemore specially, he was delighted. He began to weave plans for the future, and to dream of wandering with Evereld among those exquisite hills with their craggy rocks cropping out here and there from between dark pines and delicately fresh birches, while beyond there stretched great pine woods, and mountains whose summits were still white with snow. Kingussie furnished him with bread and with a somewhat draughty sleeping-apartment in the ruined castle which goes by the name of the Ruthven Barracks; but the night air was keen, and many a time he longed for the warmth and comfort of the hay-cart. There was something dreary, too, in the desolate shell of the old residence of the Comyns, and he awoke with

a feeling of depression which was curiously foreign to him. The morning was cloudy, and the waters of the Spey felt icy cold as he plunged into them; however, the walk through Glen Tromie which the old minister had specially recommended to him soon made him warm enough, and the wild beauty of Loch Seilich, and its surrounding precipices fully justified the praises which his guide had bestowed on them. He rested for some little while by the loch, ate his last crust, and counted over, as a miser counts his gold, the three pence which must somehow carry him to Glasgow.

"I must certainly eat less," he reflected, ruefully, having only dared the previous night to buy a penny-worth of bread. "The worst of it is this mountain air makes one so confoundedly hungry. I shall soon be reduced to eating birds' eggs, or to singing in front of village ale-houses in the hope of earning money."

His reverie was interrupted by the falling of some heavy drops of rain; he set out once more on his walk seeing plainly enough from the threatening sky that a storm was at hand. It came indeed with a speed which surprised him. Clouds, which blotted out the landscape, hemmed him in; the rising wind roared through the wilds of Gaick, and the rain came down in sheets, blinding and drenching him, for no mackintosh yet invented could have stood the pitiless deluge which showed no sign of abating, but rather increased in violence. Worst of all, he missed his path so that there was not even the comfort of knowing that every step was bringing

him nearer his destination. On the contrary, he began to fear that he had altogether lost himself.

The further he went the more hopeless he grew; he was wet to the skin, every bone in his body ached, and no sign of a track was to be found. It seemed to him that he was the only living creature in this vast solitude, and his delight was unbounded when at length, through the driving rain and mist, he caught sight of a figure approaching him. A collie sprang forward and barked, and was called back by its master, a tall, manly figure with a crook in his hand, and under his arm an ugly little black lamb. He seemed not unlike a picture of the Good Shepherd, and Ralph instantly felt confidence in the clear, kindly eyes which looked out at him in a friendly fashion from beneath the Scotch bonnet; there was something noble and winning in this dark-bearded Highlander.

"Can you put me into the track for Dalnacardoch?" asked Ralph, as he returned the shepherd's greeting. "I have lost my way in the mist."

CHAPTER XV.

“Through ways unlooked for, and through many lands,
Far from the rich folds built with human hands,
The gracious footprints of His love I trace.”

LOWELL.

ANGUS LINKLATER was in no danger of mistaking the traveller for a Brownie; one of his long, keen glances told him much of the truth about Ralph, for he had the rare gift of insight and his kindly heart warmed to the tired wayfarer.

He at once protested that it was out of the question to go on in such weather to Dalnacardoch, and invited Ralph to take shelter in his cottage, which was but a few minutes' walk.

Ralph hesitated for a moment. The rain streamed down his face and neck, his boots felt like a couple of reservoirs, and the thought of shelter was very tempting.

“I will tell you just how it is with me,” he said; “I have but a few pence left and must reach Stirling before I have a chance of getting my letters and further supplies. I think I must press on, for there is no time to be lost.”

“Put ony thought o' troublin' us oot o' your head, sir,” said Angus, instantly reading his companion's thoughts, and beginning to walk on beside him. “The hame is just a but and a ben, and you're kindly wel-

come to a' that we can gie you in the way o' food and shelter for the night."

"You are very good," said Ralph. "If you can conveniently take me in I shall be thankful. But don't be putting yourselves out for me. When I tell you that I slept last night in the ruins of the old castle at Kingussie, and in a hay-cart near Grantown the night before, you will see that to be under a roof at all will be a luxury to me."

He laughed. The shepherd gave him another of those sympathetic, discerning looks.

"You have had trouble I see," he said. "But I'm thinkin' that you're meetin' it in the right way."

"Oh," said Ralph lightly, "I'm just an actor out of work. For several weeks we have had plenty to do and no money; now we have neither money nor work, and I am hoping to get into another company."

"It's no right that ony man should work without wages," said Angus; "it's clean against Scripture. But just for a wee while I'm thinkin' that it's maybe no sic an ill thing for us to learn that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance o' the things which he possesseth."

"Well, it's not hard to agree to that now that I'm close to your house," said Ralph, "but I'll confess to you that I was beginning to despair before I met you."

"Ay," said Angus, a smile crossing his face, "Ilka ane o' us is apt to be like this stray lamb that was tryin' to mak' its way hame and was scairt almost to death with encounterin' deefficulties. It might have hed the

sense to know that as the sayin' goes, 'Where twa are seekin' they're sure to find.'"

"Is that one of your Scottish proverbs?" said Ralph, struck by the beauty of the thought.

"Ay, it is, sir, and it often comes to my mind when I'm after the sheep. Ye mauna despair though you're oot o' wark. We are maist o' us ready to say 'The Lord's my shepherd,' but at the first glint o' trouble we change the psalm and say, 'but I'm terrible feart that I'll come to want.'"

There was a sort of dry humour in his manner of saying these last words, and Ralph smiled.

"I see you are a thought-reader," he said, "as well as a thinker."

"Oh, as for that," said the shepherd, "those that spend their lives amang the mountains have aye mickle time for thinkin'. It's a gran' preevilege to be set to mind the sheep."

They were now within sight of the cottage and Angus Linklater led the way through a little garden; at the sound of their footsteps his wife opened the door, it seemed almost as though she were expecting her husband to bring someone back with him, but after one glance at the visitor her eagerness died away; she was a grave woman with dark hair parted plainly beneath her white mutch, and with a certain sadness in her eyes and in her voice. Her welcome was, however, as hearty as the shepherd's and before long she had furnished Ralph with her husband's Sunday garments and was busily prepar-

ing tea. When the tired traveller emerged again from the back room in dry clothes, he thought nothing had ever looked more comfortable than that homely little kitchen with its fire of logs, its old grandfather clock, and its quaint, corner cupboard, black with age. Some lines of Stevenson's came to his mind as Mrs. Linklater made room for him by the hearth.

"Noo is the soopit ingle sweet,
An' liltin' kettle."

Delicious too was the tea and the oatcake after his monotonous bread and water diet. Angus was still out attending to the lamb he had brought home, and Ralph wondered whether the shepherd and his wife lived alone in this quiet place. Among the few books on the shelf, he noticed, however, sundry modern adventuring books which had been the delight of his childhood. "I see you have some children," he said, finding his hostess not nearly so talkative as the shepherd had been.

"We hae a son," she replied, her eyes filling with tears, and crossing the room she took down "The Dog Crusoe" and showed him the inscription on the flyleaf.

It was a prize for good conduct awarded to Dugald Linklater. Ralph instantly felt that he had touched on a sore subject, but whether the son were dead or a source of trouble to the mother he could not guess. The book was still in his hand when Angus returned.

"Ah," he said, with a sigh, "you're lookin' at puir Dugald's prizes. We've lost him, sir. But he'll come hame yet. I'm no dootin' that. He'll come hame."

Little by little Ralph gathered the facts of the case. It seemed that Dugald had been a clever and promising lad, that Lord Ederline having a fancy for him had taken him as his valet, and for a time all had gone well. But London life had proved too full of temptation for the young Scotsman, the betting mania had seized him, and had swiftly dragged him down, until ruined and disgraced he had disappeared into those hidden depths which are sought by the failures of all classes. It was now three years since anything had been heard of him, but the father and mother still lived in the belief that he would return, and Ralph understood now the expectant look which he had noticed in the sad face of his hostess as he walked up the garden path with her husband.

The absent son seemed to dominate their thoughts, and it was with something almost like envy that Ralph, in his singularly desolate life, thought of this apparent waste of love. Was it pride, or shame or sheer wickedness that kept Dugald away from such a home, he wondered?

The Linklaters kept very early hours, and after "taking the Book" and "composing their minds to worship," they bade their guest good-night. A bed had been extemporised for him and a comfortable old settle where, with the shepherd's plaid to keep him warm, he thought himself in luxurious quarters. But sleep would not come to him at that hour in the evening and he lay for a long time watching the ruddy glow from the dying fire on the hearth and musing over many things. He was glad that the storm had overtaken him and that he

had found shelter in this Highland cottage, for in its atmosphere there was something curiously peaceful and homelike. It was many, many years since he had felt so much at one with any household—almost it seemed to him like a return to his old home. For, perhaps, nothing has more effect on a sensitive, receptive mind than moral atmosphere; while those sweet, subtle associations, which are the aftermath of a happy childhood, are more readily awakened by this native air of the soul than by things which can be actually seen.

He took leave the next morning with a sense that these people had become his friends, and that somehow they would meet again. The shepherd would fain have helped him on his way, but he knew better than to offer what his guest would little like to receive; nor did he, of course, realise how very few were the pence still remaining to him. They gave him the best breakfast the house would furnish, and Mrs. Linklater insisted on wrapping up a shepherd's pasty, which she said would make a luncheon for him; then, with kindly cordiality, they bade him farewell, begging him to let them know how he prospered.

Cheered by their friendliness, Ralph walked in very good spirits through the Gaick Forest to Dalnacardoch, and thence, after a brief rest, made his way southward to Tummel Bridge. The air felt fresh after the storm and walking was delightful, but he found no friendly shepherd's cottage to shelter him, and passed a very cold and comfortless night under the shelter of a rick, which

proved distinctly uncomfortable as sleeping quarters. Twice he was roused by mice running over his face, and in the dead of night a groan and the falling of some heavy object at his very feet made him start up. It proved to be a drunken and very dirty tramp, whose neighbourhood was highly undesirable, and Ralph shifted his quarters to the other side of the rick where the keen, north-east wind was far from pleasant. He woke again in the grey dawn, feeling stiff and miserable. The tramp still retained the leeward side of the rick, so there was nothing for it but to resume his journey, and gradually the morning mist cleared and the sun rose, revealing the fine outline of Schiehallion and chasing away the chill discomfort of the night. Indeed, by the time Ralph had reached the village of Fortingall, he was both hot and sleepy, and finding the kirkyard deserted, he lay down on a sunny patch of grass, with his head resting in one of the stone ledges that flanked the railings round the famous yew tree of three thousand years old. How long he slept he could not tell, but he awoke at length to the consciousness of hunger. Having eaten all the bread he had saved from the previous night, he wandered towards the kirk, and hearing the sound of a voice through the open windows, realised for the first time that it was Sunday. The preacher was giving out the One hundred and twenty-first psalm, and pausing to listen, he heard, to the familiar tune of "French," the following quaint metrical version.

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come my aid?
My safety cometh from the Lord,
Who heav'n and earth hath made.
Thy foot he'll not let slide nor will
He slumber that thee keeps.
Behold He that keeps Israel
He slumbers not nor sleeps.

"The Lord thee keeps, the Lord thy shade
On thy right hand doth stay;
The moon by night thee shall not smite,
Nor yet the sun by day.
The Lord shall keep thy soul; he shall
Preserve thee from all ill.
Henceforth thy going out and in
God keep for ever will."

As the last words were sung, Ralph made his way to the door and entered the little building, just as the congregation stood up to pray. He felt, as he had done in the shepherd's cottage, that sense of fellowship which was what he needed in his loneliness; nor could the length of the sermon, with its bewildering array of heads, spoil for him that May morning, and the strengthening influence of the calm worship hour, which seemed to him more spiritual, more grand in its simplicity, than elaborately ornate and showy ceremonials.

He went on his way refreshed, and, taking the road to Fearnan, soon reached the shores of Loch Tay. Away in the distance Ben Lawers rose rugged and stern against the pale blue of the sky, and the walk left nothing to be wished in the way of beauty. The only drawback was the growing sense of fatigue that came over him.

He wondered that a walk of eighteen miles could so exhaust him. It was true he had been out of training when he started from Forres, and had walked many miles each day upon short rations, but he was dismayed to find that his powers of endurance were not greater.

It was evening by the time he reached the Bridge of Lochay, and learnt that he was within a mile of Killin. Feeling now tired out, he resolved to go no further; moreover, he had learnt from experience that it was better to sleep at a little distance from towns or villages. He paused to talk to an old labouring man who was leaning over the bridge. To the left there was a lovely little wood closely shutting in the river; to the right, the stream wound its way through green hayfields, and on through the wild beauty of Glen Lochay to the distant hills which were bathed now in a mellow, sunset light. Learning from his companion that he could get food close at hand, Ralph made his way to the little white old-fashioned inn just beyond the bridge. Its walls were covered with creepers, its garden gay with flowers, and in the porch were two comfortable chairs. The landlady seemed a little surprised at his request for two penny worth of bread: she would have been yet more surprised had she known that he gave her his very last coins in payment; for the rest, she answered his questions about Killin, and the distance from thence to Callander, and let him rest as long as he liked in the porch, bidding him a friendly good-night when at dusk he once more resumed his journey. Evidently the inn closed early on

the Sabbath, for Ralph heard the door shut and bolted behind him.

He paused, and looked round in search of shelter. Not far off, the ground sloped steeply up, and fir-trees were planted about it. Climbing over the low stone wall, he made his way towards a fallen tree, the wide-spreading roots of which pointed darkly up against the twilight sky. It lay just as it had fallen in a wintry gale, its rough bark was veiled here and there by clumps of brake fern, and the turf still grew between the roots as it had grown when the tree was torn out of the earth by the storm. It proved a good shelter from the cold night wind, and Ralph crept closely down beneath it, and soon slept. His sleep, however, was disturbed by horrible dreams, and when in the early morning he awoke unrefreshed and with aching head, he felt no inclination to stay longer in his lair. Stretching his stiff limbs, he stood for a minute looking at the wonderful view before him. Beyond the river there lay a grand panorama of mountains; here and there were large plantations of fir, then came wild, bare tracks of heather, black and cheerless now without its bloom, but relieved at intervals by grey boulders and patches of grass, while little, white cottages were dotted, like rare pearls, about the landscape.

A good swim in the river revived him, after which he went on to Killin, and, seeing little chance of selling his mackintosh there, hoped for better luck that night

at Callander; and learning that there was a short cut to Glen Ogle, left the road and struck across the mountain-side, gaining, as he walked, fine views of Ben Vorlich. Toiling up in the sun proved warm work, however, and by the time he reached the gloomy, narrow glen he was thankful to wait and rest. He wondered whether it was the effect of the place or merely his own fault that such deadly depression began to creep over him. The stern, purple mountains seemed to frown on him, the tiny stream down below in the middle of the glen looked miserably insufficient for its wide, rocky bed, and the lingering mists of early morning still hung about in weird wreaths. This was the sixth day on which he had been a vagabond, and he began to wonder whether he should ever reach Glasgow. With an effort he shook off for a time the sense of impending evil, and forced himself to eat the remains of the loaf he had bought on the previous night."

"Now," he thought to himself, as once more he tramped on, "I am bound, whatever happens, to reach Callander this evening. I must walk or starve; that will be a good sort of goad."

The road was mostly down hill, and he made a brave start, passed Loch Earn, which lay far below in the valley, looking exquisitely lovely in the May sunshine, and then toiled up again towards Strathyre, pausing only to ask for some water at a grey, slate-roofed farm on the outskirts of the village. Here he learned

the comforting fact that it was but "eight miles and a bittock" to Callander, and went on in better spirits. Away to the right he caught beautiful glimpses of the Braes of Balquhiddar, and at last, to his relief, came down to the shores of Loch Lubnaig.

But the loch was nearly five miles long, and before he had gone half its length such intolerable pain and weariness overpowered him that he could hardly drag one foot after another. He was forced to rest for a while; then once more blindly staggered on, wondering what was going to happen to him and counting the milestones with the eagerness of despair. At length the loch was passed, and the two railway bridges. He knew that he must be in the Pass of Leny, and as he toiled up the hill could hear the rushing sound of the river among the trees to the right. Then came the moment when he could do no more, but sank down half-fainting by the roadside, his head resting on a rough seat which had been placed against the wall. How long he lay there he could not tell, but he was roused by the sound of footsteps close at hand. Half opening his eyes he caught sight of two hard-featured men, who glanced at him critically and shrugged their shoulders.

"Drunk," he heard one of them say, "and as early in the afternoon as this!"

The words rankled in poor Ralph's mind.

"If I had not tried to be honest it would never have come to this," he reflected. "Because my clothes are

shabby and my boots in holes they judge me. Well, it's what the poor always have to put up with!"

He dragged himself to his feet, and, noticing for the first time some steps in the wall and a path leading down to the river, thought he would hide his misery and escape from further comments. He was parched with thirst, too, but to reach the water proved hopeless. Though the river was swollen with the recent storm, it went surging and foaming below him among the rocks in a way which made him feel sick and giddy. He just staggered on by the narrow, rocky track and the wooden gallery till he reached the smoother path beyond, which led into a little wood, and here once more his powers deserted him, and he again lost consciousness.

When he came to himself he was lying uneasily across the path, his head on the mossy bank and his feet hanging perilously over the water. It just crossed his mind that he might easily enough have lost his life had he fallen in the opposite direction, and he wondered dreamily whether it would not have simplified matters, yet, wretched as he was, he felt somehow glad to be alive. Away in the distance he could see Ben Ledi rising in its tranquil beauty beyond the foaming river. There was a rocky islet, too, in the centre of the flood, with a tall, stately fir-tree growing upon it, the dark foliage strongly contrasting with the white foam and the vivid green of the trees on the further bank. To

his fancy, the rushing river seemed to ring out the tune of

“I to the hills will lift mine eyes,”

as he had heard it sung on the previous day at Fortingall Kirk.

All sorts of half-misty memories thronged his fevered brain. He thought he was walking again with Angus Linklater as he carried the ugly little black lamb; or he was out boating with his father; or he was at rehearsal, and Mrs. Skoot was wrathfully haranguing him. Through all these feverish fancies, there remained the ever-present consciousness of physical misery, and the rankling recollection of the words he had heard from the two men who had passed him on the road. Presently, yet another fancy took possession of him. He was sitting with Evereld in a theatre, and could distinctly hear the actual words of Shylock's part:

“What, what, what? ill luck, ill luck?”

“I thank God, I thank God. Is't true, is't true?”

“I thank thee good Tubal; good news! good news! ha, ha, ha, where? In Genoa?”

The voice was certainly not Washington's. He was puzzled.

“Thou stickest a dagger in me,” it resumed, then suddenly broke off, and in the pause that followed he heard steps approaching. He opened his eyes, but saw only the familiar view of Ben Ledi and the foaming

river. He had no notion that just behind him stood a tall, striking figure, and that someone was keenly studying him, not with the critical harshness of the passers-by in the road, but with the reverent sympathetic manner of the artist.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Souls in green pastures of the watered lands,
Faint pilgrim souls wayfaring through the sands,
Abide with Thee, and in Thee are at rest.”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

“CAN I do anything for you?” asked a mellow, penetrating voice.

Ralph shifted his position a little, and looking round, saw a man bending over him with a curiously attractive face, chestnut-brown hair fast turning white, large, well-shaped, blue-grey eyes, and that mobile type of mouth which specially belongs to the actor. He had a strange impression of having lived through this scene before, and in a moment there flashed back into his mind a recollection of his first day at Sir Matthew's house, of his adventure in the park, and of how Macneillie had pulled him out of the water. “Oh, is it you?” he cried, with a relief that could hardly have been greater had he met an old friend.

Macneillie in vain racked his memory: he could not in the least recall the face. However, he was not going to betray this. “Glad I came across you,” he said. “I often come down here by the river to study a part, this path is little frequented till the tourist season begins. Let me see, where did we last meet?”

"You will hardly remember it," said Ralph; "it was at Richmond. I was quite a small boy and ran up to thank you for having pulled me out of the water a few weeks before in St. James' Park. You gave me your knife."

A look of keen and sudden interest flashed over Macneillie's face.

"Of course!" he exclaimed; "I remember it all perfectly. I'm very glad to have come across you again. What is the matter now? You look very ill. Are you taking a walking tour?"

Ralph smiled. "I set out from Forres last Wednesday morning with sixpence in my pocket," he said. "It has been a roughish time."

"I should think so, indeed," said Macneillie, glancing from the slightly-built figure to the thin, finely-shaped hands, and realising in a moment how little fitted this lad was to endure hardships. "From Forres you say? What was it I was hearing a day or two ago about Forres? Oh, to be sure, Skoot's Company came to grief there."

"Yes, I was in the company," said Ralph. "Skoot left us in the lurch, and it was a sort of *sauve qui peut*."

"So you belong to the profession," said Macneillie. "That gives you another claim upon me. Perhaps you are the very Mr. Denmead that Miss Kay mentioned in her letter."

"Yes, I am Ralph Denmead. Miss Kay promised she would inquire if you had any opening for me."

"We'll see about that, but in the meantime, if I'm not much mistaken, the influenza fiend means to work his will on you. By the look of you I should say that you were in a high fever."

"I don't know what is the matter with me," said Ralph, miserably. "I suppose I fainted just now in the road. I know that a priest and a levite looked at me, said I was drunk, and passed by on the other side."

"Trust them to leap to the worst conclusions," said Macneillie. "It's the way of the world. But come, I must somehow contrive to get you to my house."

Ill and exhausted, Ralph for the life of him could not keep the tears out of his eyes.

"You are very kind," he said, brokenly; "but I didn't mean to thrust the part of Good Samaritan on to you. I'm not fit to come to a decent house."

He looked down at his travel-stained clothes, and at the holes in his boots.

"Did you mean to lie here all night?" said Macneillie.

"No, I meant to get on as far as Callander and to pawn this mackintosh. I am better. I'll push on now. Perhaps there may be a hospital."

"Well, there isn't, as it happens," said Macneillie, watching him attentively as he struggled to his feet; "and it's two miles to Callander, and if you think I'm going to allow you to walk as far as that you're much mistaken. I'm a very indifferent Good Samaritan, having no beast to set you on, but if you'll try to come

with me to the little village of Kilmahog which is not far off we can rest at a cottage I know of, have a cup of tea, and take the coach from the Trossachs which will pass there in about an hour. As for your scruples in coming home with me, you must just make away with them. My mother has often received me in quite as bad a plight years ago when I was struggling to get my foot on the ladder. We most of us have to go through it unless we happen to belong to an old professional family."

As he talked he had slipped his arm within Ralph's, and was guiding him up the narrow path, which, after a steep climb landed them once more in the road. Without waiting for much response he went on, telling story after story of his own early days as an actor, and at length the tiny village of Kilmahog came into sight, and they paused before a little, low white cottage with a picturesque porch and tiny garden. The mistress of the house seemed delighted to see her visitor, and responded most hospitably to his request for a cup of tea while they waited for the coach. She took them into a parlour hung round with sacred pictures, and possessing a most curious bed made on a sort of shelf in a curtained recess. Ralph looked longingly at it as he sank into a chair, but Macneillie shook his head.

"Yes, I see you want to be Mrs. Murdoch's patient, but those 'congealed beds,' as I always call them, are not well-suited to a fever."

"And when did ye come hame, sir," inquired the

landlady, returning with the tea tray; "and hoo are ye likin' your braw new hoose?"

"I came home at the end of last week," he replied; "and as for the house it's to my mother's liking and that's all I care for. We hear the trains a trifle too plainly for my taste, but she likes that, says, you know, that they are a sort of link with me when I'm away."

"Ah, but Mrs. Macneillie she's main prood o' her beautiful rooms, but I'm thinkin' its mair because it's her son that's made them a' for her. She was in Kilmahog last month settlin' the account for the milk, and she said to me that if a' mithers were blessed with such a son as hers there'd be a hantle less sorrow in the warld. Those were her verra words, sir."

Macneillie laughed. "My mother was always prejudiced in my favour," he said. "It's the one subject you can't trust her upon."

The good woman bustled off to make the tea, and the actor turned again to Ralph.

"My mother is the best nurse in the world: she will soon have you well again."

"Why not let me stay here?" said Ralph. "It would give you less trouble. I shall only spoil your holiday, and perhaps bring the infection into your house."

"Oh, we have most of us been down with this plague already," said Macneillie, cheerfully. "I know you covet that antique bed, but we must have you in a more airy room than this. Perhaps it will make you

hesitate less if I tell you in strict confidence that the new house would never have been built at all if it had not been for you." Then, seeing the bewilderment of his companion's expression, "I'll tell you just how it was some day, it's too long a story now, for I hear the tea-things coming."

Ralph, utterly at a loss to see how Macneillie could be under any sort of obligation to him, was obliged to leave the riddle unsolved for the present. The tea revived him, and when the coach came into sight he almost thought he could have walked that last mile. A dreamy sense of relief began to steal over him as they drove on beside the river between the wooded hills and through the pretty environs of Callander, until at last they reached the main street itself, and turning sharply to the left began to climb a steep road. Here, nestling cosily under Callander crag, with fresh green woods behind it, stood the comfortable, squarely built stone house that the actor had planned for his mother. The coach paused at the iron gate, for it was out of the question that they should drive up the steep approach to the front door; indeed, it was not without difficulty that Ralph dragged himself up the pebbly incline; he was panting for breath by the time they reached the house, and it was with some anxiety that he looked up at the white-capped old lady who stood to greet them in the porch.

"Mother," said Macneillie, "this is my friend, Mr. Denmead. He has walked all the way from Forres, and

is quite fagg d out." The keen, shrewd eyes of the Scotchwoman had perceived from a distance the sorry plight of the visitor, and she looked now not at his deplorable boots and shabby coat, but at the honest, dark eyes lifted to hers; she saw directly that they were full of dumb suffering.

"I am glad to see any friend of my son's," she said, and there was something curiously comforting in the homely sound of the Scottish accent, but when she had shaken hands with her guest an almost motherly tenderness stole into her voice. She begged him to come in and rest, made minute inquiries as to the hour when the fever attacked him, and having left him installed on a sofa in the dining-room, drew her son into the hall. "Hugh," she said, "the poor laddie is very ill. I will go and make a room ready for him, and you had better be fetching the doctor."

"I will by-and-bye, but first let us get him settled. Put him into my room, it's the most airy. I'll tell you who he is, mother." The two had gone upstairs as they were speaking, and Macneillie closed the door of his room behind them, and began helping in a deft, sailor-like way to strip the sheets off his bed. "He is the boy I told you about years ago, who saved me from making an end of myself on Christine's wedding day." At the name, a sort of shudder of distaste passed through Mrs. Macneillie; it was a name very rarely mentioned by either of them, and the mother fondly hoped that at last her son had banished from his mind all memory of

that romance of his youth. But, dearly as they loved each other, there was a good deal of reserve between them, and she could not tell how it was with him. After his absence in America, he had come back looking much older, but apparently in good health and spirits, and more than ever engrossed by his work. Little as she liked his profession, for she was full of old-fashioned prejudice and clung to all her old traditions, she nevertheless often blessed it in her heart, for she saw that he lived for it, and, spite of herself, could not help taking some interest in his efforts to raise the drama, to give only such plays as were worth acting, and to manage his company in the best possible way. Still it was undoubtedly the grief of her life that her son had chosen the stage instead of the ministry, and he was quite aware of it, and was obliged to get on without her entire sympathy. She was unable to see that he was really doing quite as good work as any minister in the land, or did she understand that an actor in refusing to follow his clear vocation, would be as blameworthy as a divine who put his hand to the plough, and then looked back. She did not speak a word now until they had the clean sheets spread and all things ready for the invalid. Then she drew her son's face down and kissed it.

"I shall love to wait on him, Hugh, now that you have told me that."

"You'll like it for his own sake too," said Macneillie. "It takes a fellow of good mettle to tramp more than a

hundred miles on six-pennyworth of bread, and wear the look he wore when I found him. Oddly enough, too, I learnt something about him from Miss Kay's letter on Saturday; he belonged to that company that failed, and she told me that she much feared he had spent almost all the money he had left, on sending back to London a forlorn little child-actress who had been deserted by the manager's wife."

"A child? Poor wee thing! There are many perils and dangers in your profession, Hugh, you can't deny that."

"Yes there are," he said, "but I am not sure that life in society, or in other professions, or in shops and factories, isn't even more risky. As for this little Ivy Grant, you may be quite happy about her; he had the good sense to send her to trustworthy friends."

No more was said, for it was time to fetch the invalid and to send for the doctor. But later on, Mrs. Macneillie opened her heart to her son.

"It's all very well, Hugh," she said, "to think that everything is made right by the little girl being in good hands for the time; but you mark my words, it will be the same story over again as your own. This poor lad will be shielding and helping Ivy Grant, and when she has other admirers, why, she'll throw him off like an old glove. It will be your own story over again, Hugh."

"I hope not," said Macneillie. "Let us believe he would have done as much for any distressed damsel.

He is a generous fellow, and every inch a gentleman; why must we assume that he has fallen in love with the lassie?"

"Didn't I find him sobbing his heart out the moment he was left to himself?" said Mrs. Macneillie.

But at this her son would do nothing but laugh. "My dear mother," he said, "That is just the sure and certain sign that he has the influenza, but as to that far worse malady no sign whatever."

CHAPTER XVII.

“So, from the pinched soil of a churlish fate,
True hearts compel the sap of sturdier growth,
And between earth and heaven stand simply great,
That these shall seem but their attendants both.”

LOWELL.

FOR some days Ralph gave his new friends a good deal of anxiety; no doubt the worry and the under-feeding of the past nine months had told upon him, and culminating in this week of hardship and exposure had left him very ill-fitted to resist the modern plague which was scourging the country. By the time he had turned the corner and was able to spend part of each day in the adjoining room, he had wound himself very closely about the hearts both of the mother and the son. For there was something in his blithe cheerfulness which was very winning and which not even the depression that always accompanies influenza could affect for very long, any more than Sir Matthew Mactavish's treatment could really embitter his nature, though it occasionally made him speak a few cynical words.

Macneillie had by this time heard the story of his life, and had set his mind at rest by offering to have him in his company at the beginning of August. He wrote, moreover, to a friend of his, the manager of one

of the Edinburgh theatres, and tried to obtain a temporary engagement for him, to fill up the summer months. To this there was for some days no response, and Ralph, who was beginning to chafe at the thought of his penniless condition, grew depressed, and with the sensitiveness of a convalescent feared that he was a burden to his kindly host. Macneillie was quick to discern what was passing in his mind.

"Pining for that hospital you were so anxious to find at Callander?" he said one afternoon when he had found Ralph unusually depressed.

The invalid smiled.

"Not exactly. But I'm wishing I needn't spoil your holiday."

"Have you forgotten what I told you as we waited for the coach that day at Kilmahog?" said Macneillie, bracing himself up as though for some effort. "This house would never have been built if it had not been for you. I saw you hardly took in what I was saying, but it's as true as that you and I sit here together smoking. I will try to tell you the whole story."

"Years ago, when I was a young fellow playing juvenile lead in Castor's travelling company, there joined us a little, forlorn girl of sixteen, fresh from school, and utterly innocent. She was very unhappy, and I, naturally enough, fell into the sort of position that you fell into with Ivy Grant. She badly wanted a protector, and I did what I could for her. Well, little by little, this sort of friendship drifted into love, and though our engagement was

not made public and was never recognised by her parents, they did not exactly forbid it or in any way hinder our intercourse, being shrewd enough, I suppose, to see that had they done so, their daughter would only have become more resolute and determined. Things drifted on like this for ten years. For five of these years we were acting in the same theatre in London, and I was fairly satisfied to wait, and never once doubted her. But there came a time when she felt hampered in her profession for want of money, and just then came an offer of marriage from a man who, though old enough to be her father, was immensely rich. He had a title moreover, and as far as I know, he was not a bad fellow—had he not been of decent repute, I am sure she would not have married him. Still I had seen enough of him to know that they had not a taste in common, and the misery of it all unhinged me. She was to be married at the close of the season, and every night—twice on Saturdays—we had to act together. It all went on like some ghastly dream”—he pushed back his chair and began to pace the room as though the recollection were intolerable. “The play was invariably ‘Hamlet’; I have never been able to face the thought of acting the part again. The only thing that carried me through was a sort of desperate resolve to keep up appearances for her sake. There had been, naturally enough, a certain amount of gossip about us, but few knew that we had been actually engaged, and in the very worst of the time there was a sort of odd sense of triumph, for I knew

that I was acting behind the scenes with a perfection which I was never likely to touch before the curtain. It told on me, though. When the end of the season came I had been for eight nights without sleep, and after saying good-bye to her, and realising that there was no need to keep up any longer, all power of rational thought seemed suddenly to go from me. I had acted my part so well that she believed that I had become reconciled to the thought of her marriage, and I suppose she thought that I should take that position of friend, which she wished me to take. At anyrate her last words were a request that I would be present at the little country church where the wedding was to take place.

"I left it uncertain whether I would go or not, and went home debating which would really be best for her, which would set her most at ease. Could I for the time efface myself so completely as to play the part of an old friend? If she had really cared for the man she was to marry, that would have been possible; I could have rejoiced in her happiness. But this, as things were, I thought out of the question. And then in the darkness of the night, as I lay wondering stupidly which would be the best for her, a wild notion that it would be best if I were dead suddenly took possession of me. I was too worn out to think anything at all about the right and wrong of the matter; it was just an overmastering idea that crowded out every other consideration. I even forgot my own mother,—that has always seemed to me the most incredible part of the whole business. When morn-

ing came, I made my preparations and walked out, with no notion at all as to place, but only a vague wish to be away from bricks and mortar. After a time I found myself in Richmond Park, and was making for a quiet glade I knew of, when there came a sound of footsteps hurrying after me, a small boy was speaking to me, telling me I had saved him once, and begging me to accept a silver knife. Here it is, you see—I have carried it ever since."

Ralph in amazement looked at his father's old fruit-knife; could such a trifling thing have played so great a part in the life of his friend?

"I only parted with yours the other day at Forres," he said, "when everything that could be spared had to go to the pawnbroker."

"Well, I'm glad it is gone," said Macneillie. "This is the only souvenir needed. I have had presentations both before that time and since, but never one that touched me as yours did. Your emphatic assurance that fruit-knives were of no use to you, since you always ate peel and all, tickled my fancy and made me smile; that was the first step back to life. And then your boyish praise was so real that it pleased me, and your hero-worshipping face haunted me. It reminded me that I should be missed at anyrate by some, and when I reached the glade I was glad that by a sudden impulse I had given you my knife in exchange. Being thus disarmed there was nothing to do but to lie down and rest, and what with the heat of the day and the long walk, I

somehow fell asleep at last. When I woke my brain was perfectly clear again, but there was this little embossed knife to remind me of the narrow escape I had had. I remember that in the distance the deer were feeding peacefully, and within a few hundred yards of me rabbits were scampering to and fro. A great longing for home seized me as I lay there watching them, the sort of hunger that always comes over a Scotsman when he has been long away from the mountains. So I hurried back to town, packed my portmanteau, and took the night train to the north. There! that is all I have to tell you; and perhaps now you'll understand that you are no ordinary stranger to me and to my mother, but that you belong to us."

"It is good of you to have told me," said Ralph, "to have trusted me with so much. But I, too, have a confession to make. That day, when we were in St. James' Park, Evereld and I knew who was talking with you as you walked up and down, and once when you stopped close to the water we could not help hearing what you both said. I think it was partly that which made us look on you as our special hero."

Macneillie paced the room silently, seeing with all the vividness of a powerful imagination that scene in the far past: the broad sunny path, the calm expanse of water, with its little wooded island, the white sails of the toy boat, the two children watching its progress, and beyond the trees on the further side of the park the great gloomy pile of Queen Anne's Mansions looming up

against the sky. Again he seemed to stand in his misery beside the iron railing looking down into a face which was deliberately hardening itself against him, yet was still the face that haunted his dreams with its strange inexplicable fascination.

Since her marriage he had never seen Christine; at first he had purposely avoided her, and after his return from America had still deemed it prudent to refuse a London engagement, and to enter on that career as manager of a travelling company which had now for some years absorbed his thoughts and his energies. He wondered often whether their paths would ever again cross, and with a certain sturdy Scottish resolution he held on his way, neither seeking nor avoiding a meeting.

He was still talking to Ralph on this summer afternoon, when his mother came into the room with the letters of the second post.

"Ha, here is one from Edinburgh!" exclaimed Macneillie. "Now we shall hear your fate. Well, it's not much of an offer, but better than nothing. Middle of June to the end of July, that will fit in well enough. To be walking gentleman after the parts you have been playing will be uninteresting, but you will at anyrate be secure of your salary, and will be acting with better people. Here is the list of plays; let us see who the stars are."

Glancing down the paper he gave a perceptible start.

"That's an odd coincidence after what we were just

talking about," he said, handing the list to his companion; and Ralph saw that in the first week of July, Christine Greville was to appear as *Ellen Douglas*. He hardly knew whether he were glad or sorry. Naturally his affection for Macneillie tended to make him a somewhat severe judge of the woman who, after a ten years' betrothal, had forsaken her lover and married for money; but nevertheless he wanted to meet her, and Macneillie was not ill pleased at the chance of thus learning indirectly how Christine prospered in the life she had chosen.

Somehow the news seemed to cheer them both. Macneillie stood gazing out of the window, lost in thought. The rain had ceased, and though the sky was still in part overclouded there were little rifts of blue, and in the west a bright gleam which swept across the hills facing the window in a long level line of golden brightness. Above, were the dark mountain tops, below, in deep shade, the woods; and the points of the fir-trees stood out sharply defined along the broad intervening strip of sunlit grass. He could not have explained his own feelings, but it seemed to him that some unexpected gleam of brightness had come, too, into his overclouded life.

During the days that followed something of the old hero-worship began to reassert itself in Ralph's heart as he learnt to understand more of his friend's character. To the genius and fervour and romance of the Kelt, Macneillie united a singularly strong and virile nature,

and although he had shaken off some of the trammels of the school of theology to which his mother still belonged, he was emphatically one whose life was ruled by faith. This was indeed generally recognised, although he was not given to many words; but the world agreed in describing him by that unsatisfactory phrase, "a religious man," and many in the profession could testify that his religion was of that pure and undefiled kind which is known not so much by word or outward observances, as by the living of a good, manly life.

There was, to Ralph's mind, something very touching in the relations between the actor and his mother. His care in avoiding all topics that could pain her, his solicitude for her comfort, and the pleasure he took in the restful home-life, which could only be his at long intervals, formed but one side of the picture. There was the ineffable pride of the old lady in her only son, her delight in his success being only modified by the unconquerable scruples which she still felt as to the stage, scruples which were, however, difficult to maintain in all their fulness when she was every day confronted by so admirable a representative of the actor's profession.

As soon as it was practicable, Macneillie made the convalescent spend a great part of each day out of doors, at first in the garden or in the wood at the back of the house, and later on, when walking became possible, on the hill-side near the wishing-well, where far away from houses and with a glorious panorama

of lake and mountain they rested for hours on the heather.

It was at these times that Ralph received some of those lessons in his art which were later on of the greatest service to him.

By the middle of June he had shaken off the last effects of the influenza, but although he was thankful to have secured an engagement, he left Callander very reluctantly, only comforting himself with the reflection that at the beginning of August he should once more be with Macneillie, and able perhaps to do a little in return for all the kindness that had been shown to him.

His Good Samaritan started him on his way with sound advice, and all things needful for a fresh beginning, and the weeks in Edinburgh passed pleasantly enough.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“On the oppressor’s side was power;
And yet I knew that every wrong,
However old, however strong,
But waited God’s avenging hour.”

WHITTIER.

AT length the day arrived when Christine Greville was to appear. A rehearsal had been called for eleven, and it so happened that Ralph reached the stage door just as the “star” with her maid in attendance drove up. He had naturally been very anxious to see her, and was pleased that their meeting should be in bright sunlight, not in the dreary gloom of the empty theatre. He caught a vision of fair hair beneath a broad black straw hat, and of blush roses that harmonised well with the beautiful but rather grave face. Then it chanced that in alighting, Miss Greville dropped her parasol, and Ralph of course promptly stooped to pick it up for her.

“Thank you,” she said, and her low voice thrilled him. “It was careless of me.” As she spoke her lips smiled, but he thought the brown eyes that for a moment met his fully were the saddest as well as the sweetest he had ever seen.

The doorkeeper having now perceived her hastened forward, and she passed into the building.

It was with some surprise that in glancing round she saw that Ralph also had entered. Something in his manner had pleased her, and she presently turned to the manager with a question.

"Who is that young fellow behind us?" she inquired, lowering her voice.

"He is a pupil of Macneillie's," said the manager, "and at present is only 'walking gentleman,' but he has the makings of a good actor in him."

"Introduce him to me," said Miss Greville.

So Ralph, to his no small delight, was presented to the great lady, who gave him a cordial hand-shake.

"They tell me you are Hugh Macneillie's pupil," she said.

Ralph flushed a little.

"He has taught me more than anyone else," he replied, "and it was through him that I got this engagement. In August I am to join his company."

"Ah!" she said, and Ralph fancied there was a sort of envy in her tone. "You are very fortunate to have such a chance. He is one of a thousand. Where did you come across him?"

"At Callander, soon after Whitsuntide. He has built a house there for his mother."

"She is still living? I am glad of that. She never liked me, having a rooted aversion to the stage and all connected with it, still she was kind to me in her way, though disapproving all the time."

"She still disapproves of the stage," said Ralph.

"But she is kindness itself; if you could but have seen the plight I was in when Macneillie found me, and took me home with him!"

At that moment they were interrupted, but when the rehearsal was over, Miss Greville again spoke to him.

"We must finish our talk," she said. "I like to hear all about my old friends. To-morrow I am driving with my little invalid nephew to Roslin—come and join us, we shall have plenty of room for you."

Ralph was delighted with the invitation; it was quite impossible to remain a stern judge of Miss Greville now that he had seen her and spoken with her. He had wondered how it could be that Macneillie, after her faithlessness, still for her sake remained single. But he wondered no longer, for it seemed to him, that quite apart from any beauty of feature or form, she was the most inexplicably fascinating woman he had ever met. Her every movement seemed to possess a subtle charm; there was a refinement and delicacy about her manner, a delicious originality about her way of talking that made all others in comparison with her seem tame and commonplace. There was, moreover, something that specially appealed to Ralph, in the sadness of her face when in repose, and its brilliant beauty when animated.

There was no rehearsal the next day, and Ralph, punctual to the minute, presented himself at the Windsor Hotel, at the time appointed for the drive. He was

shown into a private sitting-room where a little lame boy of about nine years old sat by the open window.

"Aunt Christine will be here directly," he said, greeting the visitor with great friendliness. "She was reading to me and forgot the time. Did you ever hear her read?"

"No," said Ralph, "what book was it?"

"Oh, only about Roslin, but it doesn't matter what she reads, she makes everything beautiful—it's the way she says the words. Mother used to read to me in Ceylon, but I never cared for it—it sounded so droney."

"Do you come from Ceylon?"

"Yes, I came last year," said the small invalid. "I live now with Aunt Christine, she's mother's sister, and I like her next best to mother in all the world. But Sir Roderick's a beast. You mustn't say I said so, but I hate him because he always says horrid, cutting things to Auntie. He's to meet us here, when Auntie's engagement is over, and we are to go to the Highlands to stay at a big country house belonging to his cousin."

It was impossible to check the confidences of this small child, who, with his light brown hair, eager blue eyes and sunburnt face, was by no means the typical invalid of romance, but just a restless, high-spirited boy, brimming over with life and merriment. Perhaps it was as well that at that moment his aunt came into the room.

"So sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Denmead," she said, greeting him in her charming way. "I was always

a sadly unpunctual mortal, but Charlie has no doubt been entertaining you. Is the carriage at the door? Then we will ring for one of the waiters, Charlie, to take you down."

"He carries so badly," said the small invalid, querulously. "I wish Dugald were here."

"Well, he will come with Sir Roderick on Saturday," said the aunt. "What does the waiter do?"

"I don't know, but he hurts," said Charlie, wriggling in his big chair.

"Will you let me carry you?" said Ralph.

"Yes," said the child, with the air of a monarch bestowing a favour. "Your hands are so nice and long, not podgy little things like the waiter's."

The journey to the Stanhope having been safely accomplished, and the child comfortably installed in the back seat, Christine gathered up the reins, and with Ralph in the front seat beside her, drove off in the direction of Roslin.

"There is nothing I enjoy so much as driving," she said. "It is the one real pleasure of my life."

"Greater than such a triumph as you had last night?" said Ralph.

She glanced at him with a sort of surprise.

"Did you really think I cared for that?" she said. "How young you are—how worn and *blasée* you make me feel. I cared nothing at all for that ovation—was thankful when the din ceased and I could go home and be quiet. When one is miserable, there is at anyrate

some comfort in being miserable alone—you can throw aside your smiling mask, and so get something approaching to ease. It is off now, you see, and I am treating you as if you were a trustworthy, old friend, but then you are trustworthy, I could tell that the moment I saw you. Now tell me candidly, did not Mrs. Macneillie tell you she detested me?”

“No, but I heard something of your first acquaintance with them long ago,” said Ralph; and then he coloured and hesitated, feeling that he had perhaps said too much.

And oddly enough Christine felt that he understood all, and knew that he would soon find out how, having sacrificed everything to ambition, it now profited her nothing.

“Auntie,” cried a small voice from the back seat.

She glanced round with love and tenderness in the face that a moment before had been so sad.

“What is it, darling?”

“Why those two girls were so awfully delighted to see you. I saw one catch hold of the other’s arm and say, ‘There she is?’ just as if you’d been the Queen herself.”

She laughed, but the child’s pride in her, and perhaps the remembrance that the public really loved her, touched her heart for a moment, and brought back a look of youth and gladness to her wistful eyes. She turned again to Ralph.

“Now take up our talk where it was interrupted

yesterday. You were telling me what a plight you were in when Hugh Macneillie found you. How had you got into such difficulties? Couldn't you get an engagement? Tell me your story, for we two must be friends."

She was so *simpatica* that it was impossible to resist her, and Ralph told her his story; all about the old days at Whinhaven, and his father's death; all about his adoption by Sir Matthew Mactavish and his final dismissal; all about his search for work, his first engagement, and his experiences at Washington's Theatre. Christine would have blamed him more for his folly in relinquishing his position there had she not, with her womanly insight, guessed all that he left untold of his feeling for Evereld, and understood why just at Christmas time he was in such desperate haste to get on in his profession.

With the keen interest of one who had lived the same wandering life, she heard of the adventures of Skoot's Company, and listened pityingly to the account of what Ralph called his "sixpenny tramp" through the Highlands. But when he told of the friendly shepherd who had met him in the wilds of Gaick, she made a sudden exclamation.

"Did you say the name was Linklater? Why then I think I can help you to find the lost son—my husband's man is named Dugald Linklater. He has been with us for a year, and would scarcely have endured it so long, I think, had he not been very fond of Charlie, and anxious too to get a good character. He had been valet to Lord Ederline, but had left him under a cloud,

and had been out of a situation for a long while. My husband had had a succession of men, and really took this one in despair."

"Then there can be no doubt about it," said Ralph, his face lighting up. "For I know the son was Lord Ederline's servant. This will be good news for the shepherd and his wife. How odd that one should come across him in this way. The world is but a small place after all. What is he like?"

"A dark-haired Kelt, very well-mannered, and a decidedly clever fellow. I know something of his past life, for he is going to marry my maid as soon as they have each of them saved a little money. Dugald is steady enough now, but he was nearly ruined by betting. We have very little notion, I fancy, of the sort of temptation our servants are often exposed to."

"Will he be coming to Edinburgh? Can I see him?"

"Certainly. I expect my husband on Saturday evening. Come and call on Sunday afternoon, and I will make some excuse to send Dugald round to your rooms afterwards. Then you can tell him all about his home people. But now tell me about the rest of your journey."

Ralph told the whole tale, and there were tears in his companion's eyes as he described the dire struggle of the last day of his wanderings, and his final collapse in the Pass of Leny.

"And it was there Hugh Macneillie found you?" she said tremulously.

"Yes, he is fond of going up and down that path by the river, he says it is good practice to rehearse a part in that roar of many waters. I dreamt I was back again in the theatre with Evereld, then I heard footsteps, and looked up to see his face. You can't think what a contrast it was to the faces I had seen just before in the road, with their cruel contemptuous stare; it was like looking up into the face of the Christ."

By the time they had returned from Roslin, Christine had heard all that there was to be heard, with the exception of course of the Richmond Park incident, and she was able fully to realise the sort of life which her old lover was living. She did not presume to pity Hugh Macneillie. She knew indeed that, compared with her lot, his was one to be envied; but she felt intuitively that he would never recover from the wound she had dealt him, and knew that she had deliberately robbed him of all that a man most values. Her heart was very sore that night, and Ralph, now that he knew more of her, understood with how weary an effort she laughed and talked in the green room. He longed to be able to serve her, but there was of course little he could do, beyond showing Charlie the sort of kindness which a small boy best appreciates.

It was with some trepidation that, on the Sunday afternoon at the close of her engagement, he called to take leave of her. Other visitors were in the room. She just introduced him to Sir Roderick—a tall, grey-

haired, and decidedly good-looking man, and then left him to make his way as usual to Charlie's couch.

The child greeted him with delight and eagerly showed him a Kodak which Christine had just given him, and with which he was longing to take snap-shots at the people in Prince's Street. "But I mustn't do it, Sir Roderick says, because of the fourth commandment and the Scotch being so particular. Now do you really think that the fourth commandment was meant to forbid Kodaks on Sunday?"

"Well no," said Ralph smiling. "I don't think it has much to do with photography or with our Sunday."

"And you see," continued the child eagerly, "even if we are not to do any manner of work—and of course, everyone really does a good deal—you can't possibly call it work to take a snap-shot. Why it says, you know, in the advertisement, that it's no labour at all. '*You* press the button, *we* do all the rest,' and one wouldn't ask them to do the developing to-day. It's really not so bad as Sir Roderick's ringing the bell as he's doing now, for when he rings twice like that, Dugald has to come hurrying upstairs like lightning, and I know he has had hardly any time for his dinner."

At that moment the servant entered in response to his master's peremptory summons. Ralph watched him keenly, and had no manner of doubt that this man was the shepherd's son, for the likeness to Angus Linklater was marked. An expressive little bit of pantomime followed; he could not hear the actual words spoken by

Sir Roderick, but the insufferable tone and manner of the master and the expression of long-enduring but sorely tried patience on the face of the man, were quite sufficient to reveal much of their characters. Soon after this the visitors rose to go, and Sir Roderick having taken leave of them in a pleasant and courteous fashion, turned round on his wife the moment the door was closed, and apparently forgetting that they were not alone, hurled at her a torrent of abuse and scathing sarcasm, which made Ralph long to kick him downstairs. It seemed to be about some salmon flies which had been left behind in London, Dugald having failed to find them in their right place, and imagining that they had been sent by his master with the first instalment of luggage brought to Edinburgh by the rest of the family some weeks ago.

In Lady Fenchurch's manner of receiving her husband's anger there was the calmness of long use, but her colour rose a little because of the injustice of the attack, and from a sort of shame that Ralph Denmead should witness the scene.

"I am sorry the mistake was made, but you forget we are not alone," she said, seizing on a moment when for want of breath he ceased to swear.

He glanced towards the window with annoyance, and with a malice which his hearers perfectly understood, suddenly changed his line.

"Well, if it is not your fault then it must be Dugald's fault. The d——d scoundrel shall leave the very day

I can get another man. I'm sick of the sight of him. He shall see that I'm not to be imposed upon by an idle fellow who doesn't know his duties. He shall go, and with the worst character I ever gave to a servant. He came to me with a bad one, and I'll add a telling bit to it."

"I only wonder he has endured the situation so long," said Christine, stung by the unfairness of this retaliation. "But you punish yourself more than you punish him; think what trouble you had before he came. The best servants must now and then make mistakes."

"The best mistresses are supposed to look to the ways of their household," he said maliciously, "and to have some regard for their husband's comfort. D—— you, say no more. I tell you the man shall go, and if he chooses to bring an action against me for giving him a worse character than he brought with him, I'll show up his whole past life."

With that he sauntered out of the room and Ralph, with some presence of mind, picked up the Kodak and began to talk to Charlie about the best position for taking a photograph of Princes Street from the window. In a few minutes Christine slowly crossed the room and sat down in a low chair beside Charlie's couch. Her white taper fingers played with the child's light hair, but she was quite silent, sitting there listlessly, with the exhausted look which people wear when they have been battling with a strong wind.

"And she might have been Macneillie's wife!"

thought Ralph. "How can she endure this wretched existence!"

He was made so miserable by the sight of that worst tragedy of life—a mistaken marriage—and by the thought of the grievous pain and sorrow it had entailed, that he was quite unable to perceive how immensely both Christine and Macneillie had been developed by the consequences of that very mistake.

The woman who at seven-and-twenty had sacrificed the entire happiness of another to her own ambition and the worldly arguments of her parents, who had allowed the love in her heart to grow weak for lack of nourishment, who had been capable of utterly deceiving herself and stifling her conscience, had at four-and-thirty grown clear-eyed and humble through much sorrow. And as for Macneillie, his years had been spent to such good purpose that no one with deep insight could have wished that he had married Christine Greville as she had been seven years ago. There had, perhaps, been truth in her assertion in St. James's Park—she might have dragged him down to a lower level. Undoubtedly, apart, they had each of them climbed a step higher, and she was more worthy of him now than in the old days.

"Auntie," said the child, breaking the silence at last, "you won't really let Dugald go, will you?"

She sighed.

"Not if I can help it, dear, but of course he is Sir Roderick's servant. Say no more about it, though. I

know you are fond of him and would be sorry to lose him, but we can't always have what we like."

"I should have thought you might," said the child. "You who earn such lots of money. *Can't* you have all you like?"

She laughed, but there were tears in her eyes.

"I can have you, dear, and you are my chief pleasure now," she said caressingly. Then, shaking off her cares for awhile, she began to talk to Ralph, who at the end of the call felt more ready than ever to be her devoted servant for the rest of his life.

"How Evereld will like to hear all about her," he reflected as he went down the stairs, "there will be no end to tell her next time we meet."

He was unpleasantly roused from these reflections by encountering on the staircase Sir Roderick Fenchurch, who paused to shake hands with him in the most courteous and pleasant way imaginable, as though he had utterly forgotten that Ralph had been a witness of the stormy scene in the private sitting-room. As a matter of fact, it was so entirely his custom to abuse and swear at his wife before the child, before the servants, and before anyone staying in the house, that he never for a moment imagined that this young actor would have liked to horsewhip him for daring so to treat a woman.

All the world seemed out of joint to Ralph as he walked away from the hotel through the beautiful city whose noble buildings and grand situation made such an

incongruously fair setting to the sad picture he had just looked on. He chafed bitterly against the thought of such a man as Sir Roderick ruining the happiness of his hero Macneillie, and went back to his rooms with a heart full of indignation to write the letter he felt bound to send to Callander after meeting Christine Greville. Having written sundry details as to the play they had been giving during the week, he turned to the subject which he knew would interest Macneillie.

“Miss Greville has been staying at the Windsor Hotel with her small nephew, a boy of nine, to whom she is devoted. I have been there several times, as the child took a fancy to me. He is lame, but likely they say to recover, and it is wonderful to see her care of him. Two or three times we went out driving together. She spoke much of you and of the old days. She looks as young as ever on the stage, but off it her face is careworn and awfully sad. To-day, when I went to take leave of her, Sir Roderick Fenchurch was there. He was decent enough till the other visitors were gone, but then fell into a rage with her about some salmon flies that had been forgotten; he has a tongue that cuts like a sharp razor; there’s not a pin to choose between him and the ordinary, wife-beating ‘pleb,’—in fact, I prefer the latter, for at anyrate he can be properly punished, while this polished scoundrel with his sarcasms and his cruelties of the tongue can’t be touched. She was very quiet and dignified all through this scene, but when at last he went out she looked dead tired; this sort of thing at home,

and the hard work of professional life, must be more than anyone could stand for long, I should think. An odd thing has happened. I have found the son of Linklater, the shepherd who housed me so kindly in the Gaick Forest. He is now Sir Roderick Fenchurch's man, but will not be with him much longer as the brute has given him warning—chiefly to annoy his wife I believe. Dugald Linklater has just been in to see me, and I told him I had been to his home, and that they were always looking for him to come back. He promises to write to his father at once. So there is one pleasant thing in this day, which Sir Roderick Fenchurch has overclouded. What can be the purpose in creation of such brutes? They are enough to have staggered even your prophet Erskine of Linlathen."

CHAPTER XIX.

“Nothing mars or misleads the influence that issues from a pure and humble and unselfish character. A man’s gifts may lack opportunity, his efforts may be misunderstood and resisted; but the spiritual power of a consecrated will needs no opportunity and can enter where the doors are shut.”—DEAN PAGET.

MACNEILLIE read and re-read this letter with the awful craving of a man whose love has for years been starved of all knowledge of the beloved, except the mere knowledge that she was still in the world. He had, of course, seen her name daily in the papers, and had known what plays she was acting in, but of her real life he had known nothing. He had tried to think that her marriage though necessarily falling below his ideal of married life might at anyrate be as happy as the average, might at least be tranquil and not without a certain comfortable respectability. But the brief account given in Ralph’s letter, and the many details which he could so easily read between the lines—filled him with misery. The post had brought him as usual a mass of correspondence; with a sigh of impatience he ran through it, then pushing it aside caught up his hat and hurriedly left the house. He was in no humour to climb the hill-side to the wishing-well; instead, he passed through the village, over Callander Bridge, and taking a

little footpath across the meadows, sought out a favourite nook of his beside the river Teith, which wound its peaceful course through the hay-fields. A tiny wood had sprung up near this walk at one part, and Macneillie had a special affection for a certain beech-tree which stood just at a bend in the river, and under its shade many of his pleasantest holiday hours were spent. He threw himself down now on the sloping bank beneath it. Everything was curiously still and peaceful; Ben Ledi rose majestically in the distance, framed by soft foliage in the foreground, and the river was emphatically one of those which "glideth at his own sweet will," a great contrast to the Leny, which dashed and foamed through its rocky pass. It was just this calm peacefulness he longed for in his inward struggle. With all the vividness of one blessed or cursed with a powerful imagination, he realised Christine as she now was. He knew instinctively that her heart had awakened from its sleep, that, with the dead failure of the *mariage de convenance*, her love which had only lain dormant had returned—but had returned of course to torture her. Hitherto he had been able to think of Sir Roderick Fenchurch with a sort of impartiality. He knew so very little about him; and it was Macneillie's nature to think well of people until they disillusioned him; he had even felt a sort of compassion for the man, because he knew that he could never really possess Christine's heart as he, for a time at anyrate, had possessed it. But Ralph's picture of what the husband really was behind his society

mask had driven out all gentler thoughts, had filled the Scotsman's heart with loathing, had overclouded his whole world.

Macneillie was, however, before all things, an honest man. He had not accepted conventionally the first religious truths put before him, he had thought much, he had waited patiently, had learnt by degress, and the hard training of his life had borne its fruit—it was impossible now that he should remain for long in darkness. It flashed upon him that his trouble came from having stepped out of the right order; for a time he had lost that absolute trust in God's education of every human being, which had for many years been his stronghold. The words of Ralph's letter came back to him—"brutes like Sir Roderick are enough to have staggered even your prophet Erskine of Linlathen."

The name of Thomas Erskine in itself awakened within him a whole train of memories, for he was one of the many thousands who have been rescued by the writings of that barrister, laird and saint from falling a prey to the spirit of unbelief which is the reaction alike from Calvinism and ceremonialism.

Lying under the shade of the beech-tree, the fresh air from the hills playing softly about his uncovered head, he tried to picture to himself what Erskine would have thought of this mistaken marriage, with its unhappy results, and there came back to his mind a passage in "The Spiritual Order," in which the writer spoke of the strange difficulty of retaining faith in God's loving pur-

pose when confronted with the evils of the lanes and closes of great towns which seem to be mere hot-beds of vice and profligacy. How look on those and still believe that education was God's whole purpose in creation? "It would be impossible," said Erskine, "did we not also realise that *there is no haste with God.*"

Clearly then it was the imperfection of his own nature, the weakness—not the strength—of his love for Christine, which made him so desperately impatient at the thought of her suffering; for her sake he must learn to be "strong and patient," learn to love with a diviner love, to wait with a more perfect trust. The letter had come to him like a call to arms, he was perfectly conscious that it marked a fresh turning point in his life; he had learnt more of Christine and her difficulties than he had known for years, and the only way in which he could interpret the meaning of it all was that he should pray for her in her grievous need more unceasingly than he had yet done.

And so the time passed by, and at the close of the six weeks' engagement Ralph returned to Callander for the few days that remained before Macneillie's company was to open at Southbourne with "The Winter's Tale."

It felt more like a home-coming than he could have imagined possible. His friend was delighted to have him back again; old Mrs. Macneillie was scarcely less so, and the servants gave him a cordial welcome, for though his illness had given a good deal of trouble in the house,

he had the gift of winning hearts, and the forlorn plight in which he had first arrived had awakened all the best sympathies of the hospitable Scottish household. He fancied that Macneillie's deep-set grey eyes were somewhat graver in expression than before, but his manner, with its touch of quaint, dry humour, was exactly the same as usual, and it was not until the Tuesday morning when they set off early to walk together to the Trosachs, that any allusion was made to the contents of the letter. Then, at last, as they walked along the shores of Loch Vennachar, Macneillie put a direct question about Christine.

"I am glad you got to know Lady Fenchurch," he said. "Where did she go after leaving Edinburgh?"

"She went up to the Highlands a fortnight ago to a place called Mearn Castle, which belongs to a Mrs. Strathavon-Haigh, a widowed cousin of Sir Roderick's—a very fast widow, if what I heard in Edinburgh is true. Lady Fenchurch did not want to go there, but said her husband particularly wished her to accept the invitation. So she had given up her original plan of taking Charlie to the sea, and hoped the Highland air would do him as much good."

"I suppose she was right to try to please her husband," said Macneillie, "but Mearn Castle is one of the most abominable country houses going."

"She seemed to know very little about it," replied Ralph, "only disliked this gay widow, and wanted to go to some quiet place where rest would have been more

possible. But she evidently tries to do what can be done for her brute of a husband. Oh! if you could have seen her patience, her dignity, while that scoundrel was abusing her! I wish I could horsewhip him!"

"No need," said Macneillie, in a low voice, "for every brutal word he will one day have to give account."

Something in his manner, with its deep conviction that every wrong should in the future be righteously avenged, silenced Ralph. He felt ashamed of his vehement impatience, and was not sorry that, as they approached Loch Achray, Macneillie led away from the subject by asking after the shepherd's son.

They had passed the Hotel, and were walking through the Trossachs, when they overtook a gentleman's servant laden with a soda-water syphon and a great basket of fruit which he was evidently carrying down to Loch Katrine.

Glancing at the man, Ralph gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"Why, Linklater! is it you? I was speaking to Mr. Macneillie about you only just now."

The man's face lighted up as he returned Ralph's cordial greeting, and he looked searchingly at Macneillie, having very often heard that the actor was one of Lady Fenchurch's oldest friends.

"I little thought to see you here, sir," he said, turning to Ralph. "We came this morning from Stronachlachar, for there was a good wind for sailing, and Master

Charlie was wanting to set foot on Ellen's Isle. He's there now, with her ladyship, and I came on to the Hotel to get these things for lunch."

"They have left Mearn Castle then?" said Ralph in surprise.

"Well, sir," said Linklater, with a little hesitation in his manner, "if you've not already heard, maybe I had better tell you the whole truth, for all the world must know it as soon as her ladyship sues for a divorce."

Macneillie made an inarticulate exclamation. Like one in a dream he listened to the man's brief account. It appeared that there had been a scandal regarding the young wife of one of the game-keepers on the Castle estate—that the enraged husband discovering Sir Roderick had given him such a castigation that it had been impossible to hush up the affair, and that Lady Fenchurch, on learning the truth, had left Mearn Castle.

There was a pause when the man had ended. Ralph waited for his companion to ask some question, to make some comment, but Macneillie walked on in absolute silence, evidently too deeply engrossed in his own reflections to be even conscious that he was not alone.

This, then, was the meaning of his inward perception of Christine's grievous need! In this fortnight, during which his whole soul had been absorbed in prayer for her, she had lived through the most awful crisis of her life, and now she was near to him in her forlorn, unprotected, worse than widowed condition. He must at anyrate inquire if she would see him, ask if

he could in any way help her, and here in this quiet spot there was fortunately no danger that idle talkers would comment on their meeting. He pencilled a few words in German on one of his cards and turned to Linklater.

"Give this to your mistress," he said, the title somehow sticking in his throat. "I will take a boat and row out to the island in a few minutes, and you can bring back the answer."

By this time they had walked through the glen and had reached the picturesque landing-place. Linklater hailed the Stronachlachar boatman, and set off for the island, and the others followed more leisurely, Ralph taking both oars and Macneillie sitting in the stern, though the far-away look in his eyes scarcely qualified him for the duties of steersman.

The story which Linklater had told them had been so entirely unexpected, and was in itself so revolting, that neither of them felt inclined to talk. To Macneillie, moreover, it was as though he had suddenly heard of the death of the man who had saddened his life; to all intents and purposes he considered Sir Roderick as dead to Christine, for he came of a race which for more than three hundred years has always regarded adultery as the dissolution of a marriage. To him there had never been the least question as to the distinct teaching of Christ on this point, he believed that His words clearly sanctioned divorce for infidelity to the marriage bond and gave freedom to the innocent one. No *man* could

rightly put asunder those who were married; sin only or death could part them. But proved infidelity was as truly the divider as love was the bond of union; the legal ceremonies, whether of marriage or of divorce, were but the appointed and expedient symbols of spiritual facts—the outward signs of the birth and death of married life.

The seven years of his solitude had taught Macneillie a stern self-control, and whatever he felt as they rowed across the lake was not allowed to appear at all in his face. Ralph glanced at him from time to time and marvelled, perhaps only now realising of what splendid stuff his hero was made, and how nobly he held in check that difficult temperament with which actors, artists and musicians are usually endowed.

“Which side is the best landing-place?” he asked as they drew near to the lovely wooded island.

“To the right in that bit of a creek,” said Macneillie, beginning to pay heed to the steering. “There is the boat, I see, but the men are both out of it.”

As he spoke they glided into the little, rocky cleft with its overhanging trees, its moss-grown boulders, its patches of crimson heather and purple ling. Then came a few minutes of utter silence, as they waited for Linklater’s return; Ralph felt anxious and restless, each minute seemed to him an hour, and he feared that perhaps after all Christine Greville would refuse to see anyone. As for Macneillie he just waited like one who is intently listening, but Ralph was not sure that the listen-

ing was for Christine's voice or for the servant's approaching footsteps, he had a suspicion that it was for something much more inward.

At length, to his great relief, there came a rustling among the boughs and a trampling of feet, and in a minute Linklater was striding down over the rocks towards the boat, bearing a note in his hand. Macneillie thanked him as he took the missive, and unfolding it less deftly than might have been expected of a seasoned actor, read the following words:

"You are the only man I could bear to speak to yet; please come."

He promptly stepped on shore, but Ralph lingered.

"I will stay in the boat," he suggested, "and have a pipe."

"Master Charlie is very anxious you should come and help him with his Kodak, sir," said Linklater, respectfully. "He's just up here at the top, and her ladyship is at the further side of the island, sketching."

"Very well, then, I'll come," said Ralph, and he followed his friend up the steep ascent.

In a little clearing at the top they found the small boy, who gave a war-whoop of delight as Ralph emerged from the brushwood.

"If I hadn't had such an awful longing for gooseberries, Dugald would never have met you!" he said gleefully. "Auntie is over there making a sketch, she's hidden right away by the trees, but don't go to her just yet, do stay and help us lay the things out for lunch,

Dugald is going to make a fire and boil some water, he thinks Auntie will like some tea, she's been having such dreadful headaches the last few days." Macneillie heard no more, he left Ralph and the child, and Dugald Linklater, and made his way straight through the tangle of shrubs, trees, and bushes, in the direction that Charlie had indicated. There was a gleam of white between the green leaves—it was the sun lighting up the sketching-block on her easel; in another moment he had parted the thickly-growing branches and had seen her once more.

She was sitting on a fallen tree—not attempting to sketch, but with her elbows propped on her knees and her face hidden by one of those shapely white hands he had so often kissed; the sun made a dazzling glory of her fair hair; her light grey dress and grey straw hat seemed exactly to harmonise with the green trees and the patches of heather. She had always had that instinct of "fitness" which makes some women know exactly what to wear, and when to wear it.

Macneillie stood for a minute watching intently the down-bent head, his heart throbbing so fast that he felt half-choked. At last, putting force upon himself, he moved forward. His step recalled her from her sad reverie, and starting to her feet with the nervous alarm of one who has lately undergone some great shock, she looked round as though in terror of pursuit. That startled movement, and the momentary expression he had seen in her pale face, strengthened Macneillie as nothing else

could have done; he forgot all about himself, realised only that she wanted his protection.

"You need not be afraid," he said, taking her hand in his, "of what use are old friends if not to help you in time of need?"

She struggled hard to reply, but her eyes swam with tears, her lips refused to frame a word.

"Let us sit down here and talk things over quietly," said Macneillie; "as I wrote to you just now, Dugald Linklater told us what had passed at Mearn Castle."

"He told you what he knew," said Christine in a broken voice. "He could not tell you of my interview with Sir Roderick." She paused for a minute, then the pent-up torrent of words broke forth. "I have heard of women, yes, and of men, too, refusing to be separated from a guilty partner; but there must at least be a genuine repentance to make such a plan even moral. There was none with Sir Roderick. He was vexed at the discovery, but he made light of the sin itself. In my presence he laughed over the affair. The house seemed like hell. I could not have stayed in it another hour!"

The look of shrinking horror in her face tortured Macneillie, who could so well understand how her whole being recoiled from the foul atmosphere that had surrounded her. It was because he understood how she felt herself degraded by all she had lived through that he intuitively stretched out his hand for hers, and held it in a strong, firm clasp.

"Do not dwell on all this," he said, "but tell me how I can help you."

His quiet, tender voice, the reverence of his manner, quickly soothed her. She looked up into his face, and by that mere look seemed to draw in endless stores of strength and comfort.

"Do you know," she exclaimed with seeming irrelevance, "what Ralph Denmead said about the day you found him in the Pass of Leny, when he was lying there ill and half-starved, and looked up to see you bending over him? He said it was like looking up into the face of the Christ!"

"Poor boy!" said Macneillie. "He was in an awful plight, no one with a grain of kindness in his nature could have passed him by. He has made me his debtor for life now, though; it is through him that I have met you to-day."

"We little thought," said Christine, "that those two children in St. James's Park, playing with their boat, would have anything to do with our future. How is it, though, that you are grateful to him for bringing about this meeting? It is I who am grateful to him. But you who have so much to forgive—you who have avoided me all these years——?"

"I dared not seek you out," said Macneillie, "our paths parted naturally, and it was safer so. What could I have done for you then? But now all is different. Are none of your people coming to be with you?"

"There is no one to come. As you heard, I dare say, my father died four years ago."

"Yes, I saw the notice in the papers," said Macneillie.

"He lived just long enough," she resumed, "to see how miserably his scheme had failed. I had married to please him and to help the family. Well, my sister's husband, with no help at all from me or my position, got an excellent appointment in Ceylon, so there again the scheme proved useless. Three years ago my mother went out to live with her there, she could do nothing to make me less miserable, and it only pained her to see my unhappiness. She realises things less at a distance, and now she is too much of an invalid to bear the return voyage. A year ago they sent me back Charlie, Clara's little boy, and he has been a great comfort. Except for him I am quite alone."

"I want you to understand," said Macneillie, "that it is still my highest happiness to serve you. It is quite possible that in the difficult position you are in you may need the help of a friend."

"Do I deserve your friendship?" she said questioningly; "you stood aloof all these years—you would not be my friend then, though I asked you."

"If I had been a worse man I should have accepted the place you offered in your company," said Macneillie; "or perhaps if I had been a better man, I could entirely have effaced myself and dared to take such a perilous

post. But as things were, it seemed best to go right away. Did you not understand?"

"Yes, yes," she said in a choked voice. "I understood—and honoured you. Is it only seven years since you and I acted together? It seems to me a lifetime. All that has gone between has been a sort of dreadful nightmare. And the worst of it was the feeling that I had deserved the misery, had deliberately chosen the low level and fought against you when you tried to drag me up. Oh, it is so long since I had a real friend to talk to—may I tell you all?"

"Of course," he said, gently. "Why not?"

"After a year of it I had grown almost desperate," she said, clenching her hands tightly, like one in pain, "and the season's work had tired me out; it seemed no use to try any longer even to live an honest life. There was only one thing that still held me back. I knew if I sank lower still it would grieve you more than all, and the thought of the pain I had already given you was always with me. Then one Sunday afternoon I happened to be alone. Sir Roderick had gone to stay with some friends for the Ascot week, and there came to me a little girl bringing a note from Lucy Seymour—you remember how soon after you and I were engaged we had been able to help her when she was in great trouble. Well, she wrote that her husband had died abroad and that she had just returned with her child, was herself dying and wanted to see me. I went to her at once and found her in great poverty, and in terror of being

turned out of her lodgings before the end. Her life, she said, had been a very happy one, thanks to you and me. Oh, if you could have heard her gratitude for the past. Every word she said seemed to draw me back from the horrible indifference that had paralysed me—she somehow stirred up all my best memories. She had heard that you were in America, or she would have appealed first to you, for the help had been chiefly your doing.”

“Did she die?” asked Macneillie.

“Yes, about ten days after that Sunday. I had promised to send her little girl to school, and to befriend her, if, later on, she went into the profession, and after that Lucy seemed actually to long for death, young as she was. I saw her every day, and the last night they sent word to the theatre that there was a sudden change for the worse. Directly my part was over, I went to her; she died very happily and peacefully, just as day was breaking. I had never seen anyone die before, and on the stage death is always made somehow to seem like an end, a grand sort of finale. But Lucy’s death was not like an end at all, it was as quiet and serene as if she had been merely turning a page in a book. I can’t describe to you how it altered all my ideas. Afterwards there was her little girl to care for, and that helped me too, and though I knew everything must still be hard, I tried after that—tried my very best to please Sir Roderick, and as far as I could to make our home life more endurable. We had each of us been much to

blame in marrying without any real love, and I knew that I must 'dree my weird,' as you used to say. Well, it is over now—over, and I can hardly yet realise things. Last night I wrote to my solicitor."

"I hope he is a good one," said Macneillie.

"Yes, Mr. Marriott, of Basinghall Street; but I am half afraid whether he himself is back yet from his voyage."

"Ralph Denmead may know, he is an old friend of his. I will inquire. But in any case many months are sure to pass before all the legal forms are gone through, and in the meantime you will have to live as quietly and guardedly as possible. Have you realised that?"

"Yes," she said, with a little shiver. "A fortnight of country-house life, in such a place as Mearn Castle, makes one realise evil more keenly than years on the stage."

She remembered miserably the people she had met there—men and women so utterly unprincipled that she loathed and despised them. She remembered the callous indifference with which her husband had observed all the annoyances to which she was subjected. She remembered the age-long hours, unoccupied by professional work—barren of all that could be called employment.

And then, turning from the past as from some hideous dream, she thought how restful it was to be here in this little island, with the man whose heart had never faltered from its allegiance, the lover whose self-sacrificing constancy was as untiring as the love of God. Never from his lips would she have heard such words as had filled

her with a sense of degradation at Mearn Castle. It was the depth of his love, the fineness of his reverence, which kept him now from expressing the passion which she knew filled his heart. He would wait till the law had declared her freedom—would wait and think only of how she could best be shielded from the strife of tongues.”

“If you are really at a loss for some quiet place, and for friends who can rightly protect you, why should you not go for a time to the Herefords’ house near Firdale?” said Macneillie.

“I know them very slightly,” she objected. “Besides, is not that meant for people who have no money?”

“Monkton Verney is for all, I think, who are in need—it’s a Cave of Adullam—and though you don’t know Mr. and Mrs. Hereford well, you know Miss Claremont, and she is the practical head of things.”

“I will at anyrate write to her, she is a wonderful woman for understanding,” said Christine. “I am glad you reminded me of her.”

Macneillie stood up, for he knew that it would be unwise to stay longer, and that he must somehow tear himself away.

“Write and let me know whether you go there,” he said; “and don’t forget that if I can do anything for you in any way, I have at least the right of an old friend. I see the steamer over yonder, and before long a host of people will be at the landing-stage and some of them may be rowing out to visit Ellen’s Isle. Even here, in

this paradise, Satan walks, you see, in the shape of the gossiping British tourist; and your face and mine are public property. I might do harm by staying here."

"Not even here," she sighed, "in this lonely place? And it's so long since I saw you!"

He took her hand in his, and held it for a minute tenderly; looking into his face, the beauty of its expression of strong patience startled her.

"No, not even here," he said with a quiet smile. "Your reputation is too precious to me. But remember that in any difficulty or danger I have the first right to help you."

His courage nerved her to face the parting and even to assume an air of cheerfulness.

"I must come back to Charlie," she said. "He is sure to be hungry, and there will be plenty of time for you to have lunch, too, before any tourists molest us."

So together they walked to the little encampment, where they found the photographers fraternising over the Kodak, while Dugald had the tea just ready. And since laughter and tears are not far apart, and the very people who have lived through a tragedy are happily the ones most easily moved to see all that is humorous in daily life, there followed a cheerful meal which might have surprised and even shocked a mere superficial observer of life, but contained elements of comfort in it for all who understood the griefs and trials of human-kind. Crowning it all was the unalloyed happiness of the child, whose beaming face and ringing laughter

soothed Christine's sore heart as nothing else could have done.

“*Auf Wiedersehen!*” said Macneillie, when the last moment had come, and Christine said nothing, but all her soul seemed in her eyes as she lifted them to his.

CHAPTER XX.

“Paint those eyes, so blue, so kind,
Eager tell-tales of her mind;
Paint with their impetuous stress
Of inquiring tenderness;
Those frank eyes, where deep doth lie
An angelic gravity.”

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THE last day of Evereld's school life was drawing to a close, “packing day” as they called it, and when it had been a mere question of the beginning of the holidays it had always been a rather festive occasion. But on this last evening, standing at the threshold of a new untried life, there was a good deal of sadness about it, and her usually bright face was a little clouded as she paced up and down a shady garden walk with her special friend Bride O’Ryan. The merry voices of the younger children, as they played hide and seek, and now and then a distant sound of applause from those who were watching the tennis players, made her feel melancholy, for to-morrow she would no longer have her nook in this happy, busy hive of industry, would no longer have a share in the genial life, but would be in a very different home, a home which was not her own, which had never seemed in the least homelike, and to which she did not

at all want to return. A happy remembrance caused her cheerfulness to return.

"Oh, Bride!" she exclaimed, "perhaps, after all, Sir Matthew will let me spend the next fortnight with you as we begged. He won't let me go to Ireland, he was quite set against that, but he may say yes to your sister's second letter."

"To be sure," said Bride, with her most good-humoured smile. "Why should he be saying no to such a sensible plan? He can't wish to have you in town for the first part of August. Doreen has plenty of room for you in this house she has taken on the Parade, and we will bathe every day, and have no end of fun."

"Here comes Aimée with a letter. Bride, I believe it will be from Sir Matthew; things come just when one is talking about them."

A pretty dark-haired girl now approached them.

"Fräulein asked me to give you this note," she said, "I believe it is from Cousin Doreen."

"Yes, that's Doreen's writing," said Bride. "Read it quickly, do."

And Evereld read as follows:

"MY DEAR EVERELD,

We shall be delighted if you will spend the next fortnight with us here at Southbourne. Sir Matthew is quite willing that you should do so, though he cannot spare you to us after the 14th August, as he wishes you to go with him to Switzerland. I would have liked you

to see our Irish mountains first; however, they can hold their own very well against any Alp ever created, and you must come and stay with us next year instead. Tell Bride to bring you as early to-morrow morning as you like.

Yours affectionately,

DOREEN HEREFORD."

This note gave general satisfaction, and the three friends yielded to the entreaties of some of the younger children and entered with spirit into the game of hide-and-seek, Evereld feeling all the delight of a reprieve as she realised that for a whole fortnight she should be able to stay at Southbourne and to postpone the parting with Bride.

The next morning when, somewhat saddened by all the partings they had been through, the two girls were driving down to the Parade, they suddenly caught sight of a huge poster announcing the advent on the following Monday of Mr. Hugh Macneillie's Company, and the performance of "The Winter's Tale," "The Rivals," "The Lady of Lyons," and other standard plays. Evereld knew nothing of Ralph's movements; nothing had been heard from him since the Easter holidays, when he had still been travelling in Scotland. She looked, however, with no small interest at this poster, having always remembered their childish worship of Macneillie.

"I have never seen 'The Winter's Tale,'" said Bride.

"We must certainly go. Doreen is always delighted if we want to see one of Shakspeare's plays."

By this time they had arrived at their destination and Evereld, who already knew her friend's family very intimately, found herself in the midst of a lively babel of voices, warmly greeted by pretty Mrs. Hereford, hugged by her three children, and speedily made to feel quite at home.

"How is Dermot?" asked Bride.

"Much better," replied her sister, "you will find him with Mollie in the drawing-room. Let me see, Evereld has not yet met him. We must present the family patriot to you. Poor boy, he has always been unlucky, and since his release a year ago from Clonmel gaol he has been desperately ill."

Evereld felt a little in awe of the released victim of the Coercion Act, but he proved to be the gentlest-mannered of mortals, and her womanly heart went out at once to the hollow-cheeked, large-eyed invalid whose humorous smile only seemed to add to the pathos of his face.

She was sitting the next day beside his Bath-chair on the Parade while Mrs. Hereford read to her children when, as she was watching the sedate couples who passed by in their Sunday best, she suddenly perceived at a little distance a figure that seemed strangely familiar. Surely no one but Ralph had precisely that quick, light step? His face was turned away from her, he was intent on the sea, watching the waves like one who loved

them and had no attention to bestow on anything else. He was almost passing them with only the breadth of the Parade between when a puff of wind suddenly whirled away a paper which Dermot had been reading, and hastily glancing round he picked it up and crossed over to restore it to its owner.

"Ralph!" exclaimed Evereld springing to her feet.

"You are here still!" he cried, his whole face lighting up, "I thought your holidays would certainly have begun. What good fortune to find you so unexpectedly."

"I have left school and am staying with Mrs. Hereford for a fortnight. I must introduce you to her."

Mrs. Hereford knew all about Ralph Denmead, and had always felt that he had been harshly treated by Sir Matthew Mactavish. She looked at him now searchingly and she liked him. He had one of those sensitive mouths that droop a little at the corners in depression or fatigue, but smile as other mouths cannot smile. The classical nose and well-moulded chin added character to what was otherwise just a pleasant, boyish face, bearing upon it the stamp—"good cricketer." And the thick brown hair not quite so closely cropped as the hideous prevailing fashion demanded, and the absence of beard or moustache bespoke him an actor. What she liked best about him, however, were his clear honest brown eyes, which had the power of lighting up with a most refreshing mirthfulness. There was something touching in the unfeigned delight of the friends in

this wholly unexpected meeting, and Mrs. Hereford was determined that they should have the chance of an uninterrupted talk.

"There is still an hour before tea-time," she said, glancing at her watch. "Take Mr. Denmead to see the view at the end of the Parade, Evereld, and then let us all come home together."

The two fell in with this plan very readily. The only difference between them and the couples Evereld had lately been watching was that they walked much faster and talked a great deal more. For there was much to tell and to hear, and Evereld wanted to learn every detail of the unlucky Scotch tour, and was delighted above measure to think that their hero Macneillie should have come to the rescue so opportunely.

"We saw that his Company was here to-morrow for a week," she said, blithely. "How little I dreamed that you were with him, Ralph. Mrs. Hereford is going to take us to see 'The Winter's Tale.' I do hope you have a nice part."

"Yes, I am Florizel. It's a very nice part indeed," said Ralph. "And there is such a jolly country dance. You'll like that. You can't think what a difference it is to be in a Company like this after travelling with those awful Skoots."

"Which was the worst of the two, the husband or the wife?"

"Oh the husband was bad enough, but Mrs. Skoot passes description. How she did hate me, too! If

I had had the money to do it I might easily have brought an action against her for abusive language. Towards the end of the time she was never quite sober and once at a railway station she was so hopelessly drunk that she tumbled headlong down a flight of steps, alighting exactly on the top of my bath, which she nearly knocked into a cocked hat! We know now that all the weeks they were not paying us a penny, so that many of us were half starved, she had money of her own hoarded away, and no doubt they are living on it comfortably enough."

"What became of that poor little Ivy Grant?"

"She stayed for a week with my old landlady and then managed to get into another travelling company, where she seems to be getting on well. The professor died just after her return. He was no protection to her, poor old man, in fact it was quite the other way. She had to support him, he was invalided and a confirmed opium-eater. Still it seems lonely for Ivy. She is a very plucky little girl though, and will, I fancy, get on well in the profession. Now tell me about yourself. How did you get to know Mrs. Hereford? and who is she?"

"She is the married sister of my great friend at school, Bride O'Bryan; you will see Bride when we go back to tea, and I know you'll like her. Everyone likes her, she is such fun and she is always so good-tempered. Mrs. Hereford lives partly in Ireland, but most of the year in Grosvenor Square because her hus-

band is in Parliament. And Bride will live with her now that she has left school. They were all left orphans, and Mrs. Hereford, who was a good deal older than the others, brought them up. I never knew anyone so good and delightful as she is."

"I can't think where I heard the name of Hereford just lately," said Ralph musingly.

"Perhaps it was from Mr. Macneillie, I think Mrs. Hereford has met him once or twice."

"That was it," said Ralph, "Macneillie was telling me how Mr. Hereford gave up his property, Monkton Verney, and turned it into a sort of Cave of Adullam."

He did not mention to Evereld that Christine Greville was now staying at this very place. Sooner or later she was sure to hear the whole story, but he shrank from telling her what had passed at Mearn Castle, and in no other way could he explain the step Lady Fenchurch had taken.

"What is Mr. Hereford like?" he inquired.

"I like him very much," said Evereld; "he is down here until to-morrow, so you will see him for yourself. Bride says that till he was married he never seemed to settle down to anything, that he was the sort of man everyone expected to do great things, and he never did them. But afterwards it was quite different; he began to work very hard, and now she says out in county Wicklow the peasants love him, and he makes such a good landlord. Bride says he's almost as Irish as they are."

"And you are here with them for a fortnight? Where after that?"

"With the Mactavishs in Switzerland. We shall be a party of six altogether. I am to go to keep Lady Mactavish company, for Minnie will be a good deal taken up you see with Major Gillot; they are engaged, the wedding is to be this autumn. Then there will be Sir Matthew and Mr. Bruce Wylie."

"The inevitable Wylie!" said Ralph impatiently. "I hate that man."

"And I like him very much," said Everald perversely. "You always had a most unfair prejudice against him. He will certainly be the life of the party. I was delighted to hear that he was going."

Ralph's face grew grave, there was an expression in it which startled Everald as he turned towards her.

"Tell me in earnest," he said anxiously. "Do you really like this man?"

Her truthful eyes met his fully.

"Only as I like an elderly man who used to give us chocolates and treats when we were children," she said quietly.

Ralph in his relief laughed aloud.

"He wouldn't be flattered if he knew that you called him elderly. He thinks himself just in his prime. How long shall you be abroad?"

"Six weeks I think," said Everald.

There was a silence. They had walked to the extreme end of the Parade and had wandered down to

the sea itself. "Let us sit here by this boat," she suggested. "It is so hot walking."

Ralph silently assented; she glanced at him in some perplexity. Why had he so suddenly become quiet and troubled.

"Something has vexed you," she said gently, yet with a smile. "A penny for your thoughts."

"I am thinking," said Ralph, "how hard it is that every holiday-maker, every idle loungeur in Switzerland will have the chance of being with you while I am altogether cut off from your set, and can only think how other men will be making love to you."

"They won't," she said in low tones. "A girl can always stop that if she chooses. I have heard Mrs. Hereford say so."

"If you were going to be with her it would be more bearable. But you will be with Sir Matthew, whose one idea is how to make other people and other people's money serve his purposes. Don't stop me, Everald—I can't help it—I distrust him and with very good cause. He and his hateful speculations were the death of my father. I have proof of that, actual proof."

"Then I am surprised at nothing," said Everald, understanding now all the ill-concealed dislike and antagonism between Sir Matthew and Ralph which had often puzzled her in past times.

"He ruined my childhood," said Ralph hotly, "and must I now stand calmly by while he ruins the rest of my life? Everald!"—there was a passionate appeal in

his voice which stirred the very depths of her heart, "I have no right yet to ask you to be my wife—my career is only beginning—but my darling, I love you—I love you!"

He saw her flush and tremble, but she was quite silent. Her words about a girl always being able to stop that sort of thing if she chose came back to his mind.

"Are you angry with me?" he said pleadingly. "I meant to have waited for years before speaking, but I was carried away."

She lifted her blue eyes to his, they were bright and dewy, and in her face there seemed to be the glow of sunrise.

"I am glad you didn't wait, Ralph," she said softly.

Whereupon Ralph had the audacity to kiss her in the full light of day as they sat under the shelter of the boat; and no one was any the wiser save an old fisherman who was blest with exceptionally long eyesight; he, with a smile, fell to thinking of his own young days, and softly sang as he filled his Sunday pipe the refrain of a sailor's song:

"Polly, my Polly,
She is so jolly,
The bonniest lass in the world!"

The two were silently but rapturously happy, and it was some little time before any thought of other people came to trouble Ralph. As for Evereld her heart seemed

to beat to the rhythm of his words, "I love you!" and she was not at all disposed to consider the question which soon formed itself in his mind.

"I wonder whether I was wrong to speak," he said. "You must remember, darling, that you are free, altogether free. After all, you have seen nothing of the world. You are not to let the thought of my love bind you."

"Perhaps I ought not to make a promise while I am Sir Matthew's ward," said Evereld. "That is the only thing which would make me wish to wait; and now that we understand each other the waiting ought not to be too hard."

"Suppose you tell Mrs. Hereford just the whole truth," said Ralph, "and see what she advises. I shall feel happier about it if you have someone to turn to, and if she is what she seems to be one could trust her with anything. I wish I could talk to her some day."

"Well that can easily be managed," said Evereld. "I will tell her to-night. I am sure you are right about that. Though Sir Matthew is untrustworthy we can trust her, and as I am under her care here it seems right somehow that she should know."

"She will certainly think me the most presumptuous fellow she ever met," said Ralph. "Looking at it from an outsider's point of view it is as bad as it can be. A fellow who is not quite one and twenty, and only earning three pounds a week! Mrs. Hereford will call

me 'The first of the Fortune Hunters,' and will warn you against me."

"We shall see," said Evereld laughing. "I shall be very much disappointed in her if she doesn't understand you better."

"Are you sure that you understand me?" he said wistfully.

"Yes," she said, her sweet eyes smiling into his. "I have summered and wintered you a great many times, as Bridget would say, and I very well know, Ralph, that you would much prefer it if my father had left me three hundred instead of three thousand a year. I think it is a little foolish of you, for as long as we share it what does it matter which side it comes from?"

A church clock striking four warned them that they must hasten back, and when they rejoined the others they were chatting together so naturally that no one dreamt what an important scene in their drama had been played at the other end of the beach.

Ralph found himself speedily made to feel at home in the delightful atmosphere of the Irish household, with its mirth and good humour, its cheerful babel of voices. It delighted him to think that Evereld, who had known nothing of real family life, should have found such friends, and he went back to his rooms later on in the highest spirits.

The Herefords had guessed nothing of his story and the O'Ryans had been too much taken up with their own merry discussions to be very observant, but

Macneillie saw at a glance the change that had come over his pupil.

"Well?" he said in his genial voice. "What good fortune has befallen you?"

"I have found Evereld," said Ralph blithely. "She is staying on the Parade with the Max Herefords. Here's a note for you, by-the-bye. They want us to breakfast with them to-morrow at half-past nine, it was the only free time, for they lunch at one, as he has to go up to town, and I knew rehearsal wouldn't be over by then."

"No," said Macneillie lighting a cigarette, "in your present mood you're about as likely to give your mind to Shakspeare as that lover and his lass," glancing at a very demonstrative couple on the other side of the road.

"We shall have a long and wearing rehearsal to-morrow."

"I don't understand you, Governor," said Ralph, using the old stage word for the Manager as he generally did now to Macneillie, and somehow conveying by it just the reverence and affection which he felt for the Scotsman.

"I have an unfair advantage over you," said Macneillie smiling. "I have heard a great deal about Miss Evereld Ewart and know that she is likely to distract you from your labours."

"You have heard of her? From whom?"

"From you yourself, to be sure, in the feverish nights you had at Callander. I have long been wishing

for the opportunity of quoting Mrs. Siddons to you, 'Study, study, study, and don't marry until you are thirty.'"

"Well we can't even be engaged yet," said Ralph; "but we understand each other and that is something. To-morrow you must see her."

"I will devote myself to her entirely," said Macneillie with a mirthful twinkle in his grey eyes. "And you in the meantime can be profitably improving your Irish accent with Mrs. Hereford with a view to Sir Lucius O'Trigger. Your brogue doesn't quite satisfy me yet."

CHAPTER XXI.

“So, from her sky-like spirit, gentleness
Dropt ever like a sunlit fall of rain,
And his beneath drank in the bright caress
As thirstily as would a parchèd plain,
That long hath watched the showers of sloping grey
For ever, ever, falling far away.”

LOWELL.

AFTER Ralph had left, a more sombre hue stole over Evereld's glowing sky. She began to think a little of the future, of the countless partings in store for them, and the more she thought the more silent and grave she became.

“You look tired, my dear,” said Mrs. Hereford as they walked back from church. “Come in with me and rest. The others have set their hearts on a stroll by the sea, but you had a long walk this afternoon.”

“Yes,” said Evereld, sitting down beside her hostess near the open window and looking out into the calm summer evening. “I wanted to tell you about our walk. And if ever you have time Ralph would so much like to talk to you too.”

The words were said with an effort, and Mrs. Hereford glanced at the sweet girlish face with its downcast eyes and understood in a moment what was coming.

"You two are very old friends," she said. "Bride told me that you had been brought up together and that a very nice German lady had done a great deal for you."

"Yes," said Evereld, falling naturally into all the old memories. "I don't know what we should have done without her. You see the Mactavishs never really cared for us. But she cared, and dear old Bridget and Geraghty the butler; and Ralph was just like my brother until the day Sir Matthew turned him out of the house. He failed, you know, in the exam. for the Indian Civil, and they had a quarrel and Ralph had to go. It was only in that dreadful time after he had gone that I understood how I cared for him."

"And had you not met him at all since then?" asked Mrs. Hereford.

"Yes, we met once by accident in the Christmas holidays and then I thought, I fancied, that he cared a little. But he said nothing till to-day, and now we understand each other, only Ralph will not let me bind myself in any way; he had not meant to speak yet at all, he said, but oh, I am so glad he didn't wait."

Mrs. Hereford took the girl's hand in hers and stroked it silently. Her thoughts had flown back to a day in her own life when just such an understanding had been arrived at, she had been about the same age as Evereld, and looking back now she felt sad as she realised how much inevitable pain and suspense lay be-

fore this girl, what dire possibilities of misunderstanding, what weary hours of separation.

"That is just what I should have said," she answered after that brief pause. "But now, understanding all it involves, I confess I don't want Mollie and Bride to be in a hurry to follow your example. I want them to have five or six years of free happy girlhood before all the deeper joys and cares begin. Of course we can't choose, and for you and Mr. Denmead, who have no real home, no near relations, very likely it is the best and happiest way. I am glad you told me about it, and you must promise if ever you need anyone to help you, to come to me. I suppose you can hardly make a confidant of Lady Mactavish?"

"No," said Evereld, half laughing, half crying. "They are all so horrid about Ralph. When I am one and twenty and we can really be engaged of course they must all know, but to tell them this could do no good and might do great harm."

"Sir Matthew did not insist then on your altogether breaking with your friend when he was sent away?"

"No," said Evereld, "I don't think anyone troubled to think about it until last Christmas. Then when I met him and told Sir Matthew about it, he did say something of the sort, but I told him I couldn't leave off being Ralph's friend, and he was very kind and did not forbid my writing to him in the holidays. If Ralph succeeds on the stage I believe Sir Matthew will be rather proud of him after all. He does so like people

who succeed. I suppose we may still write to each other now and then."

"Oh, I think as long as there is nothing underhand about it you may continue to write," said Mrs. Hereford. "You will write as friends, not as lovers; you must deny yourselves that luxury until you come of age. I am not preaching what I haven't practised, dear, for we had four years of that sort of thing before I was actually engaged. There are great drawbacks, but I think some advantages."

"Surely many advantages," said Evereld. "And I am much more alone in the world than you were. You had brothers and sisters."

"Yes, and a profession which was very absorbing," said Mrs. Hereford, suppressing a sigh. "Oh, I do think it is a very great gain for you, only I want you to realise that it is the sort of life that needs no end of patience and courage and strength. There will be days when all will not be so bright as you fancy. But I won't croak any more. You are likely to be much better at waiting than I was, for impulsiveness is the bane of all Irish folk."

"And you will talk to Ralph?" pleaded Evereld, knowing how much he would value the sympathy and counsel of such a woman, and secretly longing that Mrs. Hereford should know him and appreciate him better.

"Yes, to be sure," said her hostess, with the smile

that had won so many hearts. "We will colloque together after breakfast."

She was true to her promise and while Macneillie was amusing everyone with stories of various *contretemps* of stage life, she contrived to carry off Ralph to see the invalid patriot; after which they had a cosy little talk in the drawing-room with no one but Baby Donal, a sturdy little man of three, to keep them company.

"Evereld has told me about yesterday afternoon," said Mrs. Hereford, who was quite well aware that she must plunge boldly into the very heart of the matter and not wait for him to beat about the bush.

"I should never have spoken so soon if it had not been for the thought of her Swiss tour with that knave and his solicitor," said Ralph hotly. "Forgive me for the expression, but it is not too strong for him."

Mrs. Hereford laughed a little.

"You needn't measure your words so carefully; a Kelt is accustomed to much more fiery language than that. And you really think Sir Matthew Mactavish a knave? I confess he is a man I intuitively dislike, but I thought he was a great philanthropist and very much respected."

"So he is," said Ralph, his face hardening, "but some day the world will find him out. Some day when he has ruined and murdered others as he ruined and murdered my father. What a mistake it is only to hang people who are taken red-handed! They should rather hang the speculators whose victims may be

reckoned by hundreds. There are far more cruel ways of murdering people than by poison, or knives, or guns."

She had watched him closely as he spoke and saw that his wrath and indignation were genuine and deep. A great pity filled her heart, and she understood how intolerable it must seem to Ralph that the girl he loved should still be in the power of this despicable sham philanthropist.

"I think you were quite right to speak to Evereld," she said warmly. "And now that you have spoken, the worst of your anxiety ought to be over. The knowledge that you belong to each other will be strength to both of you."

All the bitterness died out of his face at her words, leaving it once more frank and boyish, and ingenuous as it was meant to be. The rasping sense of injustice had done some damage to his character, but the goodness of Macneillie and the gift of Evereld's love had already done much to obliterate the traces of the evil influence. His heart went out now to the brave noble-minded woman who so readily gave him her thought and sympathy.

"Evereld told me you would understand," he said gratefully, "I don't think I could have kept silent, but of course evil-minded people are sure to say that it is only her fortune I want."

"Evil be to him that evil thinks," said Mrs. Hereford. "No one who had talked with you for half an hour even could believe you a fortune-hunter. And

when you have lived as many years as I have done in public life, you will learn to trouble yourself very little indeed as to what people say. We shall never be true to ourselves, or of much use to any good cause, till the fear of public opinion has died in us."

"Does living in public life teach one that? I should have thought it would have taught one to howl with the wolves, to be always on the look-out for ways of pleasing the public and stroking people the right way, to dread nothing so much as alienating or offending your audience."

"Many people would agree with that view, but I believe it is false for all that. Why meddle with what does not concern you? Your work is to live your own life, to be just and independent, to be true to your own conscience, and to be a hard-working actor. You have nothing to do with the result on other people, you can never tell what it may be; and even if you pare down your actions till you fancy they will please everyone you will end by forfeiting the esteem of all. It's like the old fable of the man who first rode his ass to market and finally carried it."

"Certainly Macneillie's life is ruled in the way you approve," said Ralph thoughtfully. "There never was a manager who so sturdily refused to bow down to the public. He will not humour the depraved taste for morbid and dubious plays which has taken possession of the country of late, but insists on giving only what is really good. The result, however, is that while a man-

ager who runs one of these risky modern plays makes a fortune, Macneillie merely earns a competence."

"That may be," said Mrs. Hereford, "but the result also is that the one Manager is a curse to his country and the other a Godsend. Your habit of mind isn't so commercial that you measure success by the solid gold it brings in."

"I hope not," said Ralph, laughing. "But to one who knows how hard and wearing and anxious the life of such a man is bound to be, want of great visible success seems rather rough. However, to return to the point we started from, it is a great comfort to know that you don't think I was wrong to speak to Evereld yesterday. And a greater comfort still to know that she has you for a friend; one never feels safe somehow with a man like Sir Matthew Mactavish, but if she may turn to you in any difficulty I shall not worry half so much."

"I will promise you to be to her just what I would try to be to one of my own sisters," said Mrs. Hereford. "And you, too, must promise to treat us all as friends. Come in whenever you like, this week; you must make the most of your chance of seeing Evereld."

Macneillie in the meantime had been learning to know Ralph's future wife. He had been a little surprised at first to find that she was a decidedly reserved girl, not strikingly pretty, rather short, and wholly unlike the being he would have expected Ralph to fall in love with. This was, however, merely his first impression, he had not been two minutes in the room with her before

he observed how well her head was set on her shoulders; how in spite of her want of height there was that indescribable touch of dignity in her carriage which he had vainly tried to impart to many a novice on the stage. Then she spoke to him during a pause in the general talk, most of her talking he discovered was done to fill up gaps, and when she spoke a sort of transformation scene took place. Her face suddenly became lovely, the china-blue eyes seemed to radiate light and sweetness, the colour deepened in the softly-rounded cheeks and the most charming dimple made itself seen.

"We are all so much looking forward to 'The Winter's Tale' to-night," she said.

"You have not seen Ralph act before?" asked Macneillie, knowing quite well what the answer would be, but wishing for another variety of the transformation scene.

The blue eyes seemed to deepen in colour and an exquisite tenderness softened the whole face.

"Never on the stage," she said. "Of course I have seen him just as an amateur. Do you think he is getting on well?"

Now this last question was one to enthrall the heart of any Manager. Actually this girl did not leap to the conclusion that her lover was by nature a full-fledged actor, but asked if he was getting on.

"She is the most sensible little woman I ever came across," thought Macneillie to himself. "In such a case

even Mrs. Siddons might have qualified her advice as to marriage."

By-and-bye Evereld found herself keeping guard over Baby Donal in the drawing-room and talking to Ralph, while Macneillie and Max Hereford adjourned to the smoking-room. The two lovers were serenely happy and saw the future opening before them in all the gorgeous hues of dawn. But Macneillie received a stab from his unconscious companion which was destined to rankle in his heart. They had been speaking of Monkton Verney and not unnaturally Max Hereford, knowing that Christine Greville was a friend but knowing nothing of the true state of affairs, referred to her case.

"I only hope she will be able to get her divorce," he said casually, "but of course there is a doubt."

"A doubt?" said Macneillie, frowning. "Why, Sir Roderick never attempted to deny his guilt."

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt as to his guilt, and had she been married in Scotland all would have been well, for Scotland, though wrong I think in granting divorce for desertion, has the merit of having the same law for men and women."

"I don't understand you. I know little of the law," said Macneillie, "but certainly in my country there would be no difficulty when it was a clear case of the breach of the seventh commandment."

"There would be no difficulty in England for a man," said Max Hereford, "but a woman cannot get a divorce here unless she can prove cruelty as well as

adultery on the part of her husband. It is only one of the instances of our scandalous habit of setting up different standards of morality for men and women."

"How much longer are the English going to put up with such a grave injustice?" said Macneillie.

"Not long, I fancy, when once they realise it. But at present half of them are ignorant of the true state of things, while the evil-minded are of course unwilling to rob themselves of what they regard as a prerogative. The law as it stands is not only unjust to women but to all moral men. How easily one can picture a case where, because divorce was not granted, it was impossible for the innocent woman to marry a man who loved her."

Macneillie assented quietly. No one could have guessed how terribly this suggestion moved him, how clearly he saw in his own mind the picture of an innocent woman and an upright law-abiding man with their lives wrecked by this double-standard of morality.

"I think," he said presently, "that at anyrate in Miss Greville's case there will be little difficulty in proving Sir Roderick's cruelty."

"I hope it may be so," said Max Hereford, "but I understand from her solicitor that different views prevail as to what does exactly constitute legal cruelty. The case is not likely to come on yet for many months and the suspense must be terribly trying for her, far worse of course than for anyone in private life."

"Her decision to stay at Monkton Verney till the

case is over seems to me wise," said Macneillie. "Your Cave of Adullam is a great Godsend. I wonder what made you think of such a plan."

"Oh, the 'cave' was my wife's doing," said Max Hereford. "Miss Claremont is delighted to have her old friend Miss Greville there, and since Barry Sterne has undertaken the entire management of her theatre there is no need for her to be troubled in any way about outside things. Why Flo, Kittie," he exclaimed breaking off as two pretty little girls darted into the room, their sunburnt faces aglow with eagerness.

"Daddy, there's a man with the beautifullest voice you ever heard and we want sixpence for him," they cried in a breath, "do come and hear him."

And by sheer force of determination the two small elves dragged their father from the depths of his easy chair.

"The tyranny of daughters is a thing you have yet to learn, Mr. Macneillie," he said with a smile, as with one elf on his shoulder and the other impetuously pulling at his hand he sauntered out to the front door.

Macneillie flung the end of his cigarette into the grate and began to pace the room restlessly. The words so unconsciously spoken seemed to put the finishing touch to his pain, the fatherly pride of his companion's face haunted him and filled him with envy, and over and over in his mind he revolved the torturing doubt which had first been suggested to him that morning. Would the law free Christine?

Meanwhile through the open door there was wafted to him only too distinctly the familiar song of the street tenor:

“Love once again: Meet me once again:
Old love is waking, shall it wake in vain?”

He tried to drown the sound, humming to himself words which had often haunted him in the past:—

“I’ve aye been strong and fitt,
And can stand a gey bit thraw.”

Such a life as Macneillie’s may have two very different effects on the man called upon to endure it. Either it will harden and embitter him, and he will gradually become a mere cynical observer of others; or it will deepen and widen his whole character, and he will become more and more tender towards the lives of other people. Lynx-eyed to detect and prompt to check as far as possible all that he deemed undesirable or in the least risky among the members of his company, he was nevertheless always kind-hearted with regard to any genuine attachment. He knew Ralph now very intimately and was quite well aware that his feeling for Evereld was no mere passing fancy. In his own grievous anxiety and suspense there was comfort in throwing himself into the affairs of his *protégé*, and a growing desire to see this love-story happily worked out took possession of him. He had, moreover, taken a great fancy to Evereld, and began now to consider things from her point of view, trying to picture to himself just how she would probably feel with regard to Ralph’s profession.

She had never seen him on the stage, had never in fact seen him act at all since the time she had been of an age to understand what love meant. He wondered how the play that night would strike her. Would Florizel's love-making possibly jar a little upon her as she sat there watching it from her place in the stalls? Or would that gracious womanly wisdom which he had noticed in her save her from all petty jealousies, all thoughts unworthy of a great art? He thought it would. Still a girl of nineteen in love with a man like Ralph Denmead might perchance be excused if she were not entirely able to forget herself and her own story in the contemplation of Shakespere's play.

"I know what I will do," he thought to himself. "No one who understands the training, the learning, the drilling, the matter-of-fact element of sheer hard work that makes up the life of an actor is likely to think stage love-making a dangerous pastime. I will persuade Mrs. Hereford to bring her this morning to rehearsal."

END OF VOL I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

January 1898.

Tauchnitz Edition.

Latest Volumes:

(Continued from page 2 of cover.)

The Years that the Locust hath Eaten.

A New Novel by Annie E. Holdsworth.

1 vol.

A Modern Corsair.

A New Novel by Richard Henry Savage.

2 vols.

Sketches in Lavender, Blue and Green.

A New Work by Jerome K. Jerome.

1 vol.

A History of our own Times.

Vols. 6 & 7 (supplemental).

From 1880 to the Diamond Jubilee.

By Justin M. Carthy.

A Passing Madness.

A New Novel by Florence Marryat.

1 vol.

A Rose of Yesterday.

A New Novel by F. Marion Crawford.

1 vol.

(Continued on last page of cover.)

January 1898.

Tauchnitz Edition.

Latest Volumes:

(Continued from page 3 of cover.)

The Ways of Life.

Two New Stories by Mrs. Oliphant.

1 vol.

Uncle Bernac.

A New Novel by A. Conan Doyle.

1 vol.

Dear Faustina.

A New Novel by Rhoda Broughton.

1 vol.

Mrs. Crichton's Creditor.

A New Novel by Mrs. Alexander.

1 vol.

Poor Little Bella.

A New Novel by F. C. Philips.

1 vol.

One Man's View.

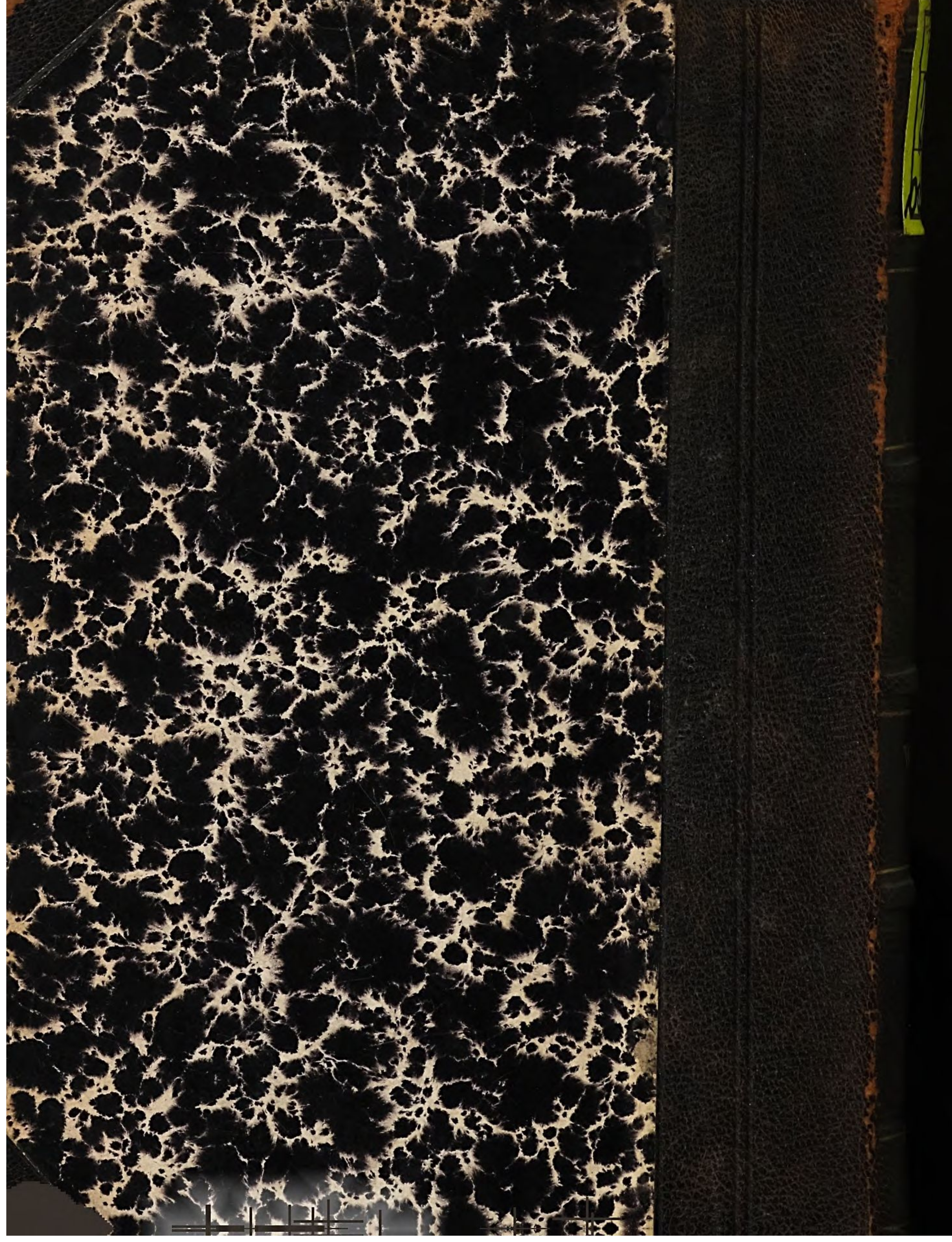
A New Novel by Leonard Merrick.

1 vol.

(Continued on cover of vol. II.)

The Tauchnitz Edition is to be had of all Booksellers and Railway Libraries on the Continent, price M 1,60. or 2 francs per volume. A complete Catalogue of the Tauchnitz Edition is attached to this work.

FRITZ GÄHR Buchbinder
F. X. Beer Nachfolger
MÜNCHEN
Weinstrasse N^o 18/II.



Lyall, Edna

Wayfaring men a novel

Bd.: 1

1898

P.o.angl. 212 odl-11

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11868929-8